

**Anarchy and Urban Subversion: A Spacehijackers' Geography**

by

Alyson Newquist

B.A. Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2002

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of  
Arts in Geography in the Graduate School of Syracuse University

April 2006

# **Anarchy and Urban Subversion: A Spacehijackers' Geography**

A thesis for the M.A. in Geography at Syracuse University by Alyson Newquist

Advisor: Dr. Don Mitchell

Committee Members:

Dr. Alison Mountz

Dr. Tod Rutherford

Dr. Jamie Winders

## **Contents**

Table of Contents	1
<a href="#"><u>Chapter One: This is What Alienation Looks Like</u></a>	3
<a href="#"><u>Chapter Two: This is What London Looks Like</u></a>	16
<a href="#"><u>Chapter Three: This is What Subversion Looks Like</u></a>	38
<a href="#"><u>Chapter Four: This is What Resistance Looks Like</u></a>	51
<a href="#"><u>Conclusion: This is What Lived Life Looks Like?</u></a>	67
<a href="#"><u>Addendum</u></a>	70
<a href="#"><u>Appendix I—Correspondences</u></a>	72
<a href="#"><u>Appendix II—Definitions</u></a>	80
<a href="#"><u>Bibliography</u></a>	82

## Chapter One: This is What Alienation Looks Like

*“Revolutionary urbanists will not limit their concern to the circulation of things, or to the circulation of human beings trapped in a world of things. They will try to break these topological chains, paving the way with their experiments for a human journey through authentic life.”*

*--Debord (1959)*

### Introduction: Tales of Co-Optation

The man stands outside Diesel's<sup>1</sup> London store holding a blank placard in the air. He states, “Normally I'd be protesting, but Diesel used protesting as a marketing campaign. It all seems a bit futile now.”<sup>2</sup> In Spring 2003, Diesel initiated an advertising campaign using “activists” engaged in fictitious protests. The adverts showcased models taking to the streets holding signs reading “More Green Lights” and other apolitical<sup>3</sup> slogans. London-based activists from groups such as the Spacehijackers and The Vacuum Cleaner waged performance art demonstrations within and outside Diesel to draw attention to the absurdity and disempowering nature of using a mode of resistance as a way to draw consumers into the spectacle.

These activists recognized the contradiction in using the mode of resistance co-opted by the company to challenge the store's transformation of resistance into image to add value to jeans. Therefore they entered the store masquerading as Diesel employees looking for some hot, new protesting gear. The performance artists rummaged through clothing picking up pre-worn pairs of jeans making comments like, “I like these. They make it look like you've had a hard-life already.”<sup>4</sup> Others practiced raising synchronized fists in the air. Retail employees of the store were asked for suggestions of what to write on the blank posters the activists brought in. After 30 minutes and the realization that the performers were not Diesel employees, they were asked to

---

<sup>1</sup> Diesel is a high-end retail chain known for its denim wear.

<sup>2</sup> [www.vacuumcleaner.co.uk](http://www.vacuumcleaner.co.uk)

<sup>3</sup> I use “apolitical” acknowledging that nothing is inherently lacking in the political.

<sup>4</sup> [www.thevacuumcleaner.co.uk](http://www.thevacuumcleaner.co.uk)

leave. The demonstration continued outside the store with activists pacing outside the building, lost without Diesel's directions on how to run their protest. They concluded with a session of prayer to the commodities sold within Diesel.

The Spacehijackers elected to target Diesel in a similarly mischievous way, posing as Diesel-sponsored activists protesting against Nike, Levi's, and the Gap. Individuals in the group dressed in homemade Diesel apparel and stationed themselves outside Diesel's competitors attempting to turn the companies against each other. Hijackers carried signs reading "Don't believe in the Gap" and "Levi's don't share." The action failed to result in corporate war but succeeded in creating a situation that attracted the attention of passersby.<sup>5</sup> In the space created by the performance enacted by the Spacehijackers, a dialogue occurred informing Londoners of the nature of corporate capitalism.

The "Che-ification"<sup>6</sup> of the Zapatista image by BoxFresh, a London clothing boutique, prompted the Spacehijackers to take similar actions. In 2001, graffiti-stenciled Zapatistas popped up on the streets and walls of the area near the boutique. The Spacehijackers followed the stencils back to their origin and realized the stencil art was part of a marketing campaign designed to sell shirts with the Zapatista image on it. The Spacehijackers detoured<sup>7</sup> the stencils by drawing bubbles out of the mouths of the image that read "BoxFresh is using the Zapatistas to sell t-shirts."<sup>8</sup> They also handed out pamphlets outside BoxFresh informing consumers of the Zapatista movement. Alarmed by the negative attention, BoxFresh contacted the Spacehijackers to set up a meeting addressing the situation. The Spacehijackers met with the owner, advert designer, and head of marketing to demand the store stop using the Zapatista image in conjunction with their logo, place a computer kiosk with access to information about

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

<sup>6</sup> The image of Latin American revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara graces shirts, album covers, key chains, and other commodities not creating profit for a contemporary revolutionary movement. The appropriation of the image of this revolutionary as an identifier of Latin American solidarity is important at the same time that it dangerously dilutes the legacy of a hero of anti-capitalism in the name of surplus-value.

<sup>7</sup> Short for detournment of preexisting aesthetic elements, or the subversion of existing uses for things. The Situationists in Paris coined this method of resistance in 1958 (SI:1958).

<sup>8</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org/html/projects/boxfreshres.html>

the Zapatistas, and donate all profits made off the image to the Zapatistas. The company conceded to all three demands.

The Diesel ads and the appropriation of the Zapatista image by Box Fresh turns culture jamming on its head. It is the reciprocal detournement of anti-capitalist protest/art against itself. Artistic subversion once targeted at denying the spectacle its psychogeographical power is now employed by the producers of the spectacle to extinguish the authority of culture jamming as a mode of resistance. Guy Debord (1991:1) writes that the spectacle “has (even) learnt new defensive techniques, as powers under attack always do.” The question is then, where does the battle against commodification and alienation occur and who has the authority over that space?<sup>9</sup> Situating this question after the dilemmas cited above additionally instigates a question of what the negation of the predicate by the subject within a dialectics of resistance really means when the subject switches from alienation to redemption through consumption of image to compounded alienation and the predicate transforms from advert to mode of resistance and back again to advert. These questions are addressed throughout the thesis.

In order to determine the site of the battle against commodification and alienation, alienation’s spatial manifestation must be explored in the first chapter. Initially within this thesis this analysis is done using the work of Karl Marx, Frederic Engels, and Guy Debord. After locating the historical sites of alienation within the first chapter, the words, writings, photographs, and actions of the above-mentioned group of proto-Situationist, culture jammers called the Spacehijackers are employed in the second chapter to determine its current site.

The Spacehijackers actively engage with and fight against the rapid transformation of advertising’s ability to co-opt and disempower resistance. The changing site of alienation resulting from the colonization of former modes and spaces of resistance changes the mode and moves the location of that resistance. This analysis composes an initial step in addressing the question of how radical activist/artist groups experience urban geographies and perceive

---

<sup>9</sup> I purposely engage with Debord’s war metaphor arguing that capitalism is waging war against the authority to claim one’s own uncommodified, unalienated creativity. Advertising attempts, and in the above-mentioned cases succeed, to colonize the mindscapes of alienated consumers and to disarm the resistance through a re-expropriation of anti-capitalist tactics.

commodification and alienation. I ask in the second chapter what sites the Spacehijackers identify as sites of alienation in order to determine who has authority over those spaces.

Accompanying the question of perception is a question regarding subversion addressed in the third chapter. Using the Spacehijackers, I explore how activists/artists attempt to subvert and transform geographies of alienation through everyday actions and rituals. I ask the Spacehijackers to locate resistance in the shadow of corporate co-optation of resistance. This thesis also explores what urban subversion artists who feel suffocated by the city's commercial images, advertising, and consumer nature believe the city should materially appear and operate as. This is also done using the words, writings, photographs, and actions of the group. Lastly, in the fourth chapter, I assess the effectiveness of the Spacehijackers' mode of subversion for challenging the spectacle.

I couch the Spacehijackers' actions, in addition to their perception of the spectacle, within a history of anti-capitalist art that explores the use of play and the scale of the everyday. This history includes artists and movements like Dadaism, Surrealism, Marcel Duchamp, the group CoBrA, Constant, the Letterists, and the Situationist International. The bridge between these past groups/individuals and the Spacehijackers is the growing movement of culture jamming over the last 20 years.

## **From the Situationist International to the Spacehijackers**

Situationists saw the essence of subversion existing within the urban environment. The Situationniste Internationale, of which Guy Debord was one of the founding members, worked toward a goal of obtaining unitary urbanism<sup>10</sup> by deliberately constructing situations<sup>11</sup> aimed at creating a new ambiance within the urban environment. Erik Swyngedouw (2003:157) notes:

Such created situations...would rehearse the recuperation of real life and celebrate an unalienated life that not only married art and life, but also displayed the immiseration of

---

<sup>10</sup>The theory of the combined use of arts and techniques as means contributing to the construction of a unified milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior (SI:1958).

<sup>11</sup>A moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events (SI:1958).

life and work that stemmed from a society in which commodification had become the totality of things.

They studied the psychogeographical<sup>12</sup> impacts of the commodified urban sphere on the lives of residents and intended to subvert it by combining art and life through the use of the techniques mentioned above. The Situationists employed a combination of artistic talent and radical politics to envision a world where dominant capitalist culture no longer dictated the will of the people through absolute commodification, advertising, and monopolization of urban space. In front of the Situationists the city morphed into a space filled with endless radical possibilities for revolution and reclamation of spaces in order to transform their meanings.

Urban areas nurtured the activities of the Situationists and continue to mold the present activities of neo-Situationists like the Spacehijackers. David Pinder (2000:363) analyzes the Situationists' identification of "'counter-sites' and points of political intervention" where "revolutionary activities might lead to the transformation of both space and society." It follows then that the city serves as the logical space for subversion of and warfare against capitalism. Amin and Thrift (2002:114) note, "The city is as much a means of shutting down possibility as it is a means, through openness of some (and only some) encounters, of opening it up." The situationists sought to create spaces within the urban environment through a focus on "the production of new modes of play" (Amin and Thrift 2002:115). Amin and Thrift identify the situationists' use of escapism within the city in order to subvert the urban environment and chronicle its commodification:

The city is often seen as a place of escape, a place to get lost (and to lose oneself) within, a way to side-step the cold (and) spreading embrace of commodity capitalism or a rampant (and growing) attachment to the self (Amin and Thrift 2002:119).

Swyngedouw (2003:157) sums up the inevitability of the situationists' use of urban areas for subversion when he writes:

The city embodied both the culmination of an alienated form of living as well as the environment from which emancipatory life, and thus revolution, must necessarily

---

<sup>12</sup> The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals (SI:1958).

emanate...the city here is simultaneously the epitome of capitalism's perversities and the cradle from which transgressive change can germinate.

The Situationists drew from Marx at the same time that they critiqued him. They related to his identification of inequality, unsustainability, and eventual destruction within capitalism, but critiqued Marx's suggestions regarding how to change social relations within capitalism. The Situationists argued that if workers fight to take over the means of production, they do nothing to combat the spectacle of twentieth century capitalism. Workers continually fight not to destroy the commodity but to be able to possess commodities and, in doing so, seal the social relations that force their wage-enslavement in the first place (Swyngedouw 2003:159). As long as workers buy the commodities they are sold by the capitalists, and alienate their labor-power in the process in order to get the wages to buy another's dead labor, the ingeniousness of the system of capitalism and its ensuing social relations are perpetuated. Situationists, therefore, focused on the means of consumption rather than the means of production (Carr 1999). The Spacehijackers expand this struggle, working to hijack the spaces of consumption's alienation.

The focal point of consumption changed the site of the revolution from the shop floor to the individual and the everyday. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner (2003) note "the Situationists focused on the city and everyday life, supplementing the Marxian emphasis on class struggle with a project of cultural revolution and the transformation of everyday life." The thoughts and actions of the Situationists influenced the Paris uprising of 1968 and many former Situationists participated in the escapades and events of the uprising. The uprising resulted in part from the changes Paris underwent post-WWII that led to increased consumption and decreased freedom. Anselm Jappe (1999:53) maintains "May 1968 was itself an attempt by the young to take back a city that had long represented a space of freedom for them but by the 1960's had changed completely." Guy Debord and the Situationists played an influential role in awakening the revolutionary spirit that led to the reclamation of Paris.

The Spacehijackers work to similarly invoke revolutionary fervor. The Spacehijackers offer the clearest example of Situationist lineage and employment of Debord's thoughts. They heed to Debord's (1955:1) call that:



If detournement were extended to urbanistic realizations, not many people would remain unaffected by an exact reconstruction in one city of an entire neighborhood of another. Life can never be too disorienting: detournement on this level would really make it beautiful.

The Spacehijackers consider themselves “Anarchitects” determined to alter the relationships between architecture and the occupant of architecture. They work to destroy architecture and hierarchies in their current forms. Space Hijackers analyze the cooptation of space by the corporate world. They write in their manifesto, “Every space that you pass through will have been designed with you in mind.”<sup>13</sup> Grocery stores are designed to slow shoppers down in more expensive areas and direct their path toward sales and items they want to get rid of. Stores selling maternity clothing pump baby powder into the air vents to make shoppers think of babies. The Space Hijackers oppose this manipulation of every facet of consumer life. They speak of “corporate image and reputation,” echoing Debord’s observation that consumers are sold an image instead of a product.<sup>14</sup> These architects/culture jammers call for reclamation of public and private spaces because:

As we can see, users of space are placed in a position of subordination in comparison to the owners of space, a hierarchy exists, although hardly an unexpected one. Space is designed in order to exert control over its users, for the means of the people who own it, to do this the services of architects are employed.<sup>15</sup>

Through the construction of situations like parties on public transportation or the placement of boxes within the city containing rubber stamps that individuals can stamp a book with to prove they visited all sites with boxes, the Space hijackers create a new mythology and language within the city. “The actions and objects become a part of the history of the space and thus become part of its language.”<sup>16</sup> Thus it follows that they believe “By setting up alternative realities for space,

---

<sup>13</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

<sup>14</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

we confuse the meaning and language of that space, therefore reducing the authority of the people that own it.”<sup>17</sup>

The Spacehijackers fight against the same attacks on freedom that Jappe notes the Situationist-influenced Paris uprising of 1968 fought against. While they do take over the streets for certain actions like spontaneous soccer games, they mostly concern themselves with the hostile takeover of the spaces of everyday life that Debord and the Situationists were interested in. Through the detournement of the everyday spaces workers occupy on their commutes or on their lunch breaks the Spacehijackers create new uses for these spaces.

## **Alienation and Commodification**

The alienation and commodification resisted by the Spacehijackers must be addressed in order to enter into an argument regarding the production of spaces of resistance. Debord addresses space and alienation in a chapter of *The Society of the Spectacle* originally titled “Territorial Domination.” The current title of the chapter, “Environmental Planning,” is less ominous than the original but still embodies the power present in the dictation of space within urban environs. Debord (1994:120) begins by stating, “(t)he capitalist production system has unified space.” This unification divides, however, by perpetuating alienation when “society eliminates geographical distance only to reap distance internally in the form of spectacular separation” (Debord 1994:120). Not only are individuals separated from each other within the spectacle (a.k.a. advanced capitalism), they are also separated from themselves. “The individual... condemned to the passive acceptance of an alien everyday reality, is thus driven into a form of madness” where s/he believes freedom from the spectacle arrives through “recognition and consumption of commodities” (Debord 1994:153).

This “recognition and consumption” cloaks itself under a guise of choice, but Debord (1994:110) notes, “daily lived experience embodies no free choice.” Optimists mistake the resulting “artificially distinct moments” for rebellion and distinction through choice, the notion of “voting with one’s dollars” (Debord 1994: 110). The choice of a new generation never even reaches the point of differential ideologies of revolution and remains in the realm of carbonated

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

beverages. Rebellion through choice comes down to which exit ramp you choose to get to the strip mall. I disagree with Debord however, using the Spacehijackers words and actions, when he writes that daily-lived experience embodies no free choice. As illustrated below, the location of rebellion lies in everyday choices, resistance, and movement. I do agree though that rebellion through which commodities one chooses and/or recodes after consumption does nothing to subvert the spectacle. It feeds the spectacle. Individuality cannot be obtained through consumption of another's alienated labor. Under current social relations, according to Lucaks, a consuming and/or producing subject becomes an object when attempting to realize him/herself through the consumption of a product made through the exploitation of another's labor.<sup>18</sup> Consumers/producers internalize not only the commodities of past alienations but the images of current alienation, "alienation that has forbidden and petrified" lived life (Debord 1994: 116). It is lived life, however interpreted by the artist/activist, that is the end goal of overcoming alienation's spatial manifestations.<sup>19</sup>

Alienation, once imbedded into the geography of our current epoch of capitalism, manifests spatially within urban environments. The rearrangement of residences of workers who fled urban areas after WWII proved essential to capitalist development. This spatial separation of certain workers<sup>20</sup> from the means of production and their places of work created networks of roads and transportation routes lined with billboards and gas stations. The separation of both the worker from the workplace and from a community of workers sharing a class identity lead to the emptiness the billboard advert targets. Social and spatial alienation, alienation of "producers of an *estranged present*," resulted from the lack of freedom found through the production and consumption of billboards and advert inserts (Debord 1994: 116). The processes of production

---

<sup>18</sup> This product may be tangible like a car or semi-tangible like an image selling the car. At the time of the purchase of the car both are bought, but the image can be bought without the exchange of currency. Images are bought when a consumer sees the advertisement and thinks, "I want to be that." Whether or not the commodity is bought is irrelevant to the consumer of image. I can buy into the notion of thinness without buying the body firming lotion described below in the photos. As soon as I buy into this notion I fuel the beauty industry that hopes to perpetuate feelings of self loathing and body hatred. The beauty industry profits as soon as I think I am not good enough.

<sup>19</sup> This lived life, in order to stay in line with Anarchist philosophy, cannot impede on others' freedom. Therefore, the capitalist cannot seek out freedom by accumulating capital because this accumulation depends on the exploitation of others' labor.

<sup>20</sup> Under the auspices of this paper, "worker" is not nuanced enough and is generalized and usually middle-class, white, heterosexual, abled, and male. I do this to stay in line with the concept of "worker" that Debord dealt with while recognizing that "worker" means different things based on the worker's identity.

and consumption subject workers to a “*violent expropriation of their time*” where they become spectators of their own lives (Debord 1994: 114).

According to Hegel, “time is a *necessary* alienation” where “the subject realizes himself [or herself] while losing himself [or herself]...in order to become truly himself [or herself]” (Debord 1994:115). These subjects, turned objects (Debord via Lucaks), realize themselves through the creation of their material reality<sup>21</sup> while losing themselves through the consumption of image and the acceptance of environmental planning regimes. The separation of image from commodity and the sale of the image back to the producers of commodities is the real way producers of the spectacle create docile bodies. These images shape and mediate social relations and the spectacle overrides appreciation of the labor imbedded in commodities; fetishism blinds consumers from seeing the cycles of their alienation. As stated above, workers make material, tangible products and internalize both the dead labor of past alienations and the images of current alienation, “alienation that has forbidden and petrified” lived life (Debord 1994: 116). The gas stations and strip malls that occupy the land at the end of an exit ramp off the highway going to and from the city provide sites of consumption to reconcile the emptiness created by “petrified” life.

Debord addresses the creation of highway networks as a result of urban sprawl and its perpetuation of alienation through a removal of individuals from the spaces they move through on their way to and from work. He is also enraged at the supremacy the automobile is given over housing. He writes, “the projected freeways in Paris will entail the demolition of thousands of houses and apartments although the housing crisis is continually worsening.” Debord also notes:

The explosion of cities into the countryside...is presided over in unmediated fashion by the requirements of consumption. The dictatorship of the automobile, the pilot product of the first stage of commodity abundance, has left its mark on the landscape in the dominance of freeways that bypass the old urban centers and promote even more dispersal (Debord 1994:123).

Debord (1959) states that “to want to redesign architecture to accord with the needs of the present massive and parasitical existence of private automobiles reflects the most unrealistic

---

<sup>21</sup> Workers live in the world they create through their labor.

misapprehension of where the real problems lie.” Commuting time infringing on “free” time, in addition to travel solidified solely as a component of work and not an enjoyable activity, composes the problem. The encroachment of work on time otherwise spent living and enjoying life in addition to the accommodation of space specifically to fit the needs of production makes social relationships like the family obsolete. Workers’ positions as producers alienate them from the enjoyment of life at the same time that it alienates them from the spaces of the city where they could enjoy life. Debord (1959) proposes unitary urbanism as a solution to this separation and isolation:

It aims to form an integrated human milieu in which separations such as work/leisure or public/private will finally be dissolved. But before this is possible, the minimum action of unitary urbanism is to extend the terrain of play to all desirable constructions.

He calls for a hostile takeover of the everyday spaces workers occupy in hopes that in the process they will transform everyday life. This includes the homes and neighborhoods where workers live. The Spacehijackers extend Debord’s call to the spaces of transportation urban dwellers occupy. By alerting Londoners to the continuous policing of their space, the Spacehijackers work to dissolve the authoritarian hierarchies imposed on them by the planners of space.

The planned communities workers occupy, planned without their consent through “an authoritarian decision-making process that abstractly develops any environment into an environment of abstraction,” further rationalize workers (1994:122). Debord (1994:122) writes, “the general trend toward isolation, which is the essential reality of urbanism, must also embody a controlled reintegration of the workers based on the planned needs of production and consumption.” This isolation through segregation and ghetto/suburbia-formation “is the modern way of tackling the ongoing need to safeguard class power by ensuring the atomization of workers dangerously massed together by the conditions of urban production” (Debord 1994:121). Here Debord’s Fordism-era Marxism comes to the forefront. He writes:

The proletarian revolution is that critique of human geography whereby individuals and communities must construct places and events commensurate with the appropriation, no longer of just their labor, but of their total history (Debord 1994:126).

Therefore workers and or activists must expropriate not only the means of production but also the history that shaped the current epoch of capitalism in addition to the geography in which this history manifests.

## Resistance's Dead Labor

David Pinder (2000:367) draws attention to Debord's Thesis 169 in *The Society of the Spectacle* where Debord writes that urbanism is the spatial manifestation of capitalism and therefore molds space in its image. Debord (1994:121) writes:

Urbanism is the mode of appropriation of the natural and human environment by capitalism, which, true to its logical development toward absolute domination, can (and now must) refashion the totality of space into its own peculiar décor.

In *Theory of the Derive*<sup>22</sup> Debord (1958) responds to the negative psychogeographical effects of the city's "absolute domination" by proposing the derive, an intentional walk-through of the city involving "playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects." Debord (1958) draws attention to Chambart de Lauwe's work on the psychological impacts of urban living. De Lauwe states that neighborhoods are not completely defined by geographic and economic limits but also involve the perceptions of residents and those who do not reside in the neighborhood. Geographers employing cognitive mapping techniques test this statement and others like it. Cognitive mapping allows residents of a neighborhood to illustrate the boundaries of the space they live in through the construction of hand-drawn maps. Residents of wealthier areas, who are more mobile, draw cognitive maps with much smaller scales that encompass large expanses of land. Residents of less-wealthy neighborhoods, those with limited mobility, draw large-scale maps detailing their block or a few streets. The Situationists used cognitive mapping to "measure the distance that actually separates two regions of a city, distances that may have little relation with the physical relation with the physical distance between them" (Debord 1958). Debord (1958) suggests the detournement<sup>23</sup> of pre-existing maps and that navigational tools no

---

<sup>22</sup> This appeared anonymously in the *Internationale Situationniste* #2, but it is known that Debord authored it.

<sup>23</sup> Short for detournment of preexisting aesthetic elements (SI:1958).

longer be used for purposes “of precisely delineating stable continents, but of changing architecture and urbanism.”

Debord (1958) addresses differential perception of urban space when he states “cities have psychogeographical contours, with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones.” The planners of cities desire to keep certain people out of certain spaces and to allow only certain others in. The derive transcends this spatial apartheid.<sup>24</sup> “The lessons drawn from derives enable us to draw up the first surveys of the psychogeographical articulations of a modern city,” through an:

ecological analysis of the absolute or relative character of fissures in the urban network, of the role of microclimates, of district neighborhoods with no relation to administrative boundaries, and above all of the dominating action of centers of attraction (Debord 1958).

“The primarily urban character of the derive” is due to cities’ roles as “centers of possibility and meaning” (Debord 1958). Debord (1958) blatantly states his contempt for the rural when he writes, “wandering in open country is naturally depressing.” Urban space is where humans see their image reflected. Debord (1958) quotes Marx: “Men can see nothing around them that is not their own image; everything speaks to them of themselves. Their very landscape is alive.”

When certain humans see their own image replaced by corporate caricatures of themselves as in the case of Diesel and BoxFresh’s proliferation of an activist image to sell jeans, the only option to keep their landscape alive is resistance. The relationship between the changing sites of alienation and the changing sites of resistance speeds up the avant-garde nature of this resistance. Activists resisting the spectacle must stay ahead of the spectacle in order to subvert it. The Situationists identified this need to create new modes of resistance in order to experience new and freer modes of living. Debord’s ideas greatly influenced the actions of the Situationists living in urban areas like Paris and continues to influence urban activists like the Spacehijackers. It is the Spacehijackers’ perception of urban space, urban subversion, and implementation of praxis that I turn to in the following two chapters.

---

<sup>24</sup> Mike Davis’ term (spatial apartheid) used to describe urban planning schemes in Los Angeles.

## Chapter Two: This is What London Looks Like

I approached the bar nervously, not knowing what to expect upon entering. I spent the afternoon visiting drug stores looking for disposable cameras to give to the group.<sup>25</sup> The least expensive option I found came in a “Party Pack” with streamers, confetti, and hologram-print cameras. After acquiring the cameras I realized I needed notebooks for the members of the group to write their observations in. I ended up at the market around the corner from my house purchasing tiny notebooks most likely aimed at elementary-school age children. So I entered the bar with two bags of hologram cameras and juvenile notebooks and the hope that the Spacehijackers were down-to-earth, unpretentious artists.

I contacted Robin, the founder of the group, months earlier to ask if the Spacehijackers desired to be part of my research project. After assuring Robin preemptively that I am not a cop and my interest purely lay in reintroducing Anarchist reclamation of space into Geography, I asked if the group would like to take part in a photography project.<sup>26</sup> The simple project entailed handing out cameras to ten Spacehijackers asking them to take pictures of what, on their everyday travels through the city of London, they fought against and for.

Robin arranged for me to meet the group during its early-summer Social and Planning Meeting at The Angel bar on St. Giles High Street. This afforded me the opportunity to not only to ask for volunteers for my research project but also to meet the group and hear them discuss the projects they planned on working on for the summer. My nervousness subsided after getting a drink or two in me, introducing myself to the group with a warm reception, and listening to them describe exciting actions like Midnight Cricket, Rooftop



<sup>25</sup> I need to note the regret I also felt at not purchasing the cameras before I left the United States where they were much cheaper.

<sup>26</sup> To view our communication via email please see Appendix I.



Picnics, and the Birmingham A-Z Retail Tour.<sup>27</sup> Robin formally introduced me to the group after they finished discussing plans for actions. At this point in the evening my fear of pulling out the contents of my plastic bags disappeared. Perhaps the discussion of dressing up as lions and throwing their bodies on Land Rovers and Range Rovers to draw attention to the excessiveness of using these vehicles in the city did it. Perhaps the overwhelming drunkenness of the Spacehijackers did it. Regardless, I pulled out my party pack as I described what I hoped to find out through the photos. To my surprise the Spacehijackers actually fought over who received the hologram cameras and the accompanying goodies. One Spacehijacker, Greenman, seemed to enjoy the streamers more than the camera (See photo to right).

I informed the participating members of the Spacehijackers that I planned to use the photos to guide accompanying interviews about their observations. In these interviews I would also eventually ask Spacehijackers about their involvement in actions. The bulk of the latter portion of these interviews is discussed in the next chapter.

The purpose of the photography project was to understand what the city of London looks like to the Spacehijackers who continue the subversive legacy of the SI. As illustrated in the first chapter, many academics analyze historic accounts of the Situationist International (SI) and their perceptions of the urban environment in addition to their endeavors at detournement in order to achieve unitary urbanism.<sup>28</sup> I sought current examples of this observation of alienation in addition to examples of the unlikely hope for a new way of urban living that results from the Spacehijackers' observations. I desired to know who has authority over the spaces the Spacehijackers hijack in order to analyze spatial power struggles.

I received cameras back from Robin, Arthur, Ladybird, and Ben Invasion and conducted interviews with the above-mentioned Spacehijackers and Mike Cupcake and Litost. Their observations at times overlap each other and vary in focus from corporate takeover of the urban landscape to environmental issues to politeness to Closed Circuit Television. Often the photographers focus on the co-optation that began this thesis. Dividing up the observations into categories proves as futile as the photos prove diverse. For this reason I divide the individual

---

<sup>27</sup> These actions in addition to many others are detailed in Chapter Three.

<sup>28</sup> David Pinder, Eric Swynghedouw, Deron Albright

observations of the non-camera-thief Spacehijackers up as each individual presented them to me. I begin with Arthur.

## Arthur

I begin with Arthur because I spent much of my time in London with Arthur and got to know him quite well.<sup>29</sup> Arthur's sites of alienation are all sites/things relating to him. Other Spacehijackers sought out larger scale sites within London. Ladybird, whose observations are revealed in the next section, sets her sights on much larger sites. Arthur also elects to explore his own alienation through his photos. This opens up the notion of the everyday by transcending the artificial boundaries between "self" and "space" that other Spacehijackers (unintentionally) reified by taking photos mostly of the built environment. Arthur begins his photos with a picture of his alarm clock writing on the back of the photo, "Boo to the tyranny of time fascism." His honesty in admitting to the copious amounts of concession involved in the everyday life of an anarchist in the city is refreshing. He follows up the alarm clock with a picture of the university he attends writing on the back, "Formal education: fuck you and the pulpit you rode in on." Arthur attended several institutions of higher learning in the last twelve years. His current foray into organized education is how he, as a Canadian, ended up in London.

Arthur is a craftsman studying the art of violin and guitar making. He illustrates the contradictions of expressing an environmental ethic and utilizing wood, some rare, in his craft. He took a photo of the woods he uses to make violins and guitars writing on the back, "The quality and quantity of wood available even only 100 years ago vastly outstrips current supplies. How, then, to maintain the viability of timber as an ethically usable material?" In a photo he took of Big Ben, attached to the Houses of Parliament, he waxed poetic about the "difficulty of being meaningfully politically (in its broader sense) engaged."

Addressing the decreasing lack of choice within capitalist social relations and concurring with the statement made in the previous chapter about the lack of political change possible

---

<sup>29</sup> This is not however favoritism, simply familiarity.

through consumption, Arthur took a photograph of an organic grocery. He writes that while he “likes the increase in availability of organic food and the discussion it provokes,” he notes he:

dislikes the frequent lack of depth of that discussion—what about monocultures, growing for export, corporate ownership of farms? And the comparatively minimal health benefits unless the choice to eat organic is part of a larger lifestyle choice. But lifestyle and consumer activism don’t quite cut it for me anyway.

He would rather be working for Food Not Bombs as he did in Vancouver and Montreal before moving to London and getting involved with the Spacehijackers. This radical food-distribution network transforms wasted or cast-away food and into meals for individuals without food, from punk lifestyle-anarchists to elderly homeless. By making larger the acts of choosing not to participate directly in the economic exchanges of food and producing new modes of operating in the city respectively, Food Not Bombs compounds lifestyle and consumer activism in the same way I argue in chapter four that the Spacehijackers compound performance based activism.

Choice does appeal to Arthur-the-consumer however in a photo in which he pays tribute to both the “politics of diversity” and to The Doors by entitling it, “Oh Show me the way to the next whiskey bar...” The photo of a liquor store in Soho offers hope to him that corporate homogenization of products and simultaneous diminishment of choice is not finalized. He writes, “Many whiskeys, all in one shop, lovely individually, but all the more so in the yet remaining (albeit diminished) possibility of finding such diversity so assembled.” Whereas the possibility of radical change through “lifestyle and consumer activism” does not appeal to Arthur, the possibility of choice in beverages of imbibement does.

Commenting on a photo he took of a gray street scene with a man in a gray suit, Arthur similarly noted the deceptive influence of corporations on workers. He writes he does not like “how hard it is to make a living outside the commercially oriented employment structure.” In interviews he elaborates on this telling me he felt gray represented a colorless world of alienation. In another street-scene photo Arthur discusses his distaste for Old Compton Street and its “forced anonymity and the resistance of people to contact with strangers.”<sup>30</sup> Additionally,

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

“it is filled with tourists and people who are really bad at walking in public.”<sup>31</sup> He continues, “Some people are really good at walking in public and generally make themselves small and unobtrusive and other people just take up loads of space no matter how small they are.” The occupation and direction of individuals in public space is something the Spacehijackers address through their actions detailed in the next chapter.

Like the observations of the Spacehijackers who follow Arthur in this assessment, many consider the natural environment and disturbances thereto. In a photo of an enclosure in a park, Arthur notes, “I don’t like enclosures...especially arbitrary ones.” This echoes the Spacehijackers cry to break down what they identify as the false barriers of architecture. Arthur places together two photos of clouds in an artistic attempt at addressing various environmental issues. He likes pretty clouds and the density of people in places like London that provokes so much activity and dislikes “phallogentric skylines and urban architectural culture focused on the production of objects” and “environmental change that messes with weather patterns.”<sup>32</sup>

Arthur similarly identifies an open space designed for skateboarders as an alienating space. This is an interesting observation when juxtaposed to Robin numerous observations of skateboarders’ reclamation of city space. It is the intentionality of the skateboarding space that bothers Arthur; the reigning in of the radical act that birthed the Spacehijackers.<sup>33</sup> Arthur finds “these ‘public’ squares very unpleasant spaces (in part due to the degree of regimentation), but am quite pleased that some people manage to put them to good use.”<sup>34</sup>

In order to distinguish from the token-ness of his photo of a Starbucks’ sign, Arthur writes, “more offensive than lousy coffee or dubious business practices is the ubiquity of image and language that so actively interferes with my ability to think.” Another advert polluting Arthur’s visual environment offends his sense of self-direction. The advertisement reads, “Make

---

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Arthur, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> More on the relationship between skateboarding and the origins of the Spacehijackers appears in chapter Three.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur’s notes on his photos.

the right choice for you office.” Arthur retorts back, “I don’t want an office, or the suggestions that I might need one.”<sup>35</sup>

In a solute to my overall project, Arthur includes a photo of two books: *The Society of the Spectacle* by Guy Debord and *Arcana: Musicians on Music* edited by John Zorn. He writes:

I was going to write something about praxis issues. Then I realized I’d shot this photo from really close up and that it would likely turn out very blurry (maybe even illegible) so I was going to caption it ‘It’s hard to get close,’ or something like that. But the outcome was unexpected and now I’m stuck in thinking of a way out.<sup>36</sup>

The constant rethinking of photos, actions, and the relationship between the current state of the urban environment and the praxis involved in analyzing and challenging it is additionally addressed by the remaining participants in the photo project.

## Ladybird

One of the most interesting things about Ladybird’s observations is the contradiction between her large scale sites of alienation and her sculpture installations. She creates small-scale villages in the cracks of aged stone walls, builds discrete towns under stairwells, attaches bug sculptures covered in fake moss to walls covered in real greenery, and places shiny red bug creatures on fire extinguishers. All of these installations are in public places and remain hidden to most passers by. Ladybird is partners with Robin, the founder of the Spacehijackers, and often compares the art she makes to the performance art projects Robin does. She describes her work as not as important as what Robin does and often feels her work pales in political importance. I disagree however and feel her work showcases what city-dwellers see and do not see in their everyday travels. Her work reclaims even the tiniest of public spaces and undoubtedly brings joy to the person strolling down the street who chances to look deeper at the wall he/she passes. At its root this thesis focuses on the reclamation of public space and the subversion of private space and Ladybird’s installations do just that. Her artwork fights against the doldrums of modern city

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

living as much as larger scale art performances like the Circle Line Parties described in the next chapter. Out of all the artists I met in London who are doing amazing work, Ladybird's work impressed me the most and forced me to look closer at my everyday forays within urban environments.

Ladybird's first observation towers over not only her installations but the entire city of London. With the meticulousness of a sculptor of tiny things, she not only wrote a detailed description of why she found the Gherkin offensive but included a blurb from *Zoomorphic New Animal Architecture* by Hugh Aldersly-Williams touting the Gherkin as a bastion of progressive architecture. He writes:

This 40-story building designed by the architect Norman Foster houses the UK headquarters of the major reinsurance company Swiss Re. It is claimed to be 'the capital's first environmentally progressive tall building... The tapering profile and circular plan provide aerodynamic conditions which reduce ground-level wind speeds compared with a rectangular tower, and assist natural ventilation internally by means of spiral light wells.<sup>37</sup>

Ladybird retorts to this statement, writing that she cannot disassociate the Gherkin "from being a giant phallus, an extension of the architect's penis."<sup>38</sup> She continues on, irritated at the hypocrisy of modern architecture that "seems to express more about a desperate attempt to hide environmental imbalances, the plundering of the world's natural resources... than a balance and harmony between nature and civilization." She continues her outrage, writing:

I do like the idea that it is making an effort to be environmentally friendly, but then again I am always reminded of the fact that President George Bush lives in the most environmentally sound ranch ever to be built - it didn't stop him from refusing to sign the Kyoto Treaty and it doesn't make the businesses inside this building nice. I get very frustrated when corporations try to create a friendly façade in an attempt to hide the lack of integrity that they display in most of their business ventures.

---

<sup>37</sup> From *Zoomorphic New Animal Architecture* by Hugh Aldersly-Williams noted in Ladybird's notes on her photos.

<sup>38</sup> Ladybird's notes on her photos.

Other forms of corporate greenwashing appear in Ladybird's notes. She focuses one photo of lush greenery in an office-front window. In the industrially-organized workforce she feels the presence of these large plants serve two corporate purposes: preventing "receptionists and secretaries from moaning about the clinical and impersonal space in which they have to work" and inducing "a sense of the company's caring and fair 'green' attitude to business (i.e. we are a team, you can trust and will want to invest in)."<sup>39</sup> Ladybird does, however, desire more green in the city and launched Operation: Ivy League "to encourage the planting and subsequent nurture of ivy growth on the buildings of the City."<sup>40</sup> She hopes to "draw attention away from the intended language of the buildings," the alienating, "offensive-looking buildings in the City of London." The covering of buildings in London by ivy counteracts "the depressing and overbearing language of the architecture" and encourages "wildlife to an area from which they are usually unwelcome."<sup>41</sup>

This affinity toward wildlife explains her love of weeds and the sunshine they need to grow.<sup>42</sup> Ladybird feels a sense of solidarity with weeds who also act as nature's reclamation artists. She writes:

anywhere that a drainpipe drips or bricks absorb moisture, moss, weeds, and wild flowers take advantage and blossom, creating a sort of decorative border around the city walls. This has the same effect on me as discovering a spider's web down a forgotten back-alley in the city or spying a 'city' fox amongst the rubbish.<sup>43</sup>

To Ladybird, weeds serve as a big "fingers up" to the nature-oppressing forces of modern urbanity.<sup>44</sup> The sun that feeds these weeds also figures in to Ladybird's analysis of the urban environment she lives in. She echoes Arthur's observations of the alienating grayness of the city.

---

<sup>39</sup> Ladybird's notes on her photos.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Upon re-reading this sentence I realize it sounds like Ladybird is a nature-loving hippie who floats through London attaching bugs to walls and thinking about small animals. While she is the above person I feel it is interesting to note that she is a smart/modern dressing woman who is never without bright red lipstick and blue eye shadow.

<sup>43</sup> Ladybird's notes on her photos.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

The day she took this photo she said she felt a bit down and then the sun came out and “poured its beams of light down between these two buildings.” She continues, “I’ve always found the effect of the weather on people’s moods quite incredible. She then suggests “the working week should be a lot shorter and people should be encouraged to spend as much time outdoors as possible.”<sup>45</sup>

Ladybird identifies numerous sites in London that keep her fighting for change and creating as an artist. Ignoring the possibly aesthetically unappealing sight of a large rubbish chute, she writes:

I have always been a great fan of these rubbish chutes that can be found at construction sites. Probably on account of their shape and bright colour, when I first spotted them as a child, I assumed that they were slides for adults (a variation on the covered slides at my local swimming pool). I often rate architecture on its ability to appeal to the imagination of an individual, allowing them to create their own stories and versions of it.

Here the essence of play necessary to participate in neo-Situationist activities arises. The ability to pay attention to what is ordinarily not seen and to create new meanings for these unseen objects is essential to creating a new mode of operating in the city as I argue in the first chapter the Situationist did and will argue in the last chapter the Spacehijackers currently do. Ladybird also sneaks peaks into backyard gardens to find Londoners’ detoured treasures. She finds and takes a photo of an old bathtub converted into a tadpole bath. She writes that this is “a great example of recycling and what better use to put an old bath to than as a garden pond?!”<sup>46</sup> Her overwhelming ability to find beauty at the same time she locates sites that disgust her quiets claims that people on the left always look toward the negative around them.

Ladybird also identifies the different textures in the London that occupy her everyday thoughts and observations. Her daily travels through the city involve “the somewhat less notable areas of architecture and the city that people would generally pass by with little thought to. These areas include corridors and staircases, subways, walls, corners and in particular areas of architectural neglect or dereliction.” She continues that “such areas provide a ‘textural feel’ to

---

<sup>45</sup> Ladybird’s notes on her photos.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



the city and seem to paint a more ‘truthful’ picture of the world that we inhabit; they are to some degree places that have escaped the control and intentions of architects and town planners.”

These textures become the text that Ladybird reads as she travels through her city. The layers of peeling billboard offer her hope of a visual environment unpolluted by advertising’s ability to make one feel less than.

I attended an event with Arthur, Ladybird, Greenman, and Robin at 491 Gallery, one of Ladybird’s highlighted places that fights against urban degeneration and planned renewal that compromises social spaces. The fractalized event started with a morning discussion about connecting all Londoners to each other through the use of renegade, wireless internet towers. Later in the day we broke into groups to discuss various plans for the summer. I chose to attend a planning session about the European Creative Forum due to both an interest in the Forum and a disinterest in the technological discussion going on in other rooms. My sessions proved to be quite pointless for me as the group discussed logistics for the event and I planned to leave London well before the Forum. Eventually I ended up in the large outside area behind the gallery, drinking cider with the Spacehijackers and discussing the history of the gallery. As Ladybird writes in her notes on 491 Gallery, it is “an excellent example of a good use of one of the many abandoned or dis-used factory spaces in London.” It is also a testament to the formerly-progressive squatting laws in England. 491 Gallery describes itself as “a meta-conceptual living room, a pirate utopia reclaiming neglected land and property and giving something back to the community with a healthy balance of art, regeneration, education, performance, gardening, and diversity of life.”<sup>47</sup> The gallery started in 2001 when two artists “found” the building open and filled with feces, needles, and trash and decided to make it, and the adjoining five buildings, into a community art space. 491 Gallery and the artists who keep it running serve as a testament to the lasting power of art on communities in need of rejuvenation. As Ladybird notes below, developers could easily have taken over the area and put condos up under the guise of rejuvenation, or urban regeneration. Instead a group of trouble-making artist hell-bent on a freer society reclaimed the space and put it to use as a space of social change. Ladybird sums the space up when she write that 491 Gallery is “a far more productive use of

---

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.491gallery.com/history.htm>

space than the usual way in which a big company will buy such a building and turn it into ridiculously expensive luxury flats, encouraging the un-wanted gentrification of an area.”

The last space Ladybird photographs is Tower House which additionally exemplifies the relationship between gentrification and rejuvenation in London. Ladybird includes a brief history of Tower House, built by philanthropist Lord Rowton to provide inexpensive, sanitary living quarters for working people. She notes that ironically, both Stalin and George Orwell stayed at this guesthouse with Orwell noting that the bathrooms were ““excellent.””<sup>48</sup> Ladybird includes that three years ago plans arose to close down the now prostitute and heroine-addict squatted building and put up luxury flats. She asks, “It would surely be more in line with Lord Rowton's original intentions for the place if these people could be housed there in a more permanent way and the place become more of a hostel than a luxury block of flats?”<sup>49</sup>

The last observation of Ladybird’s that I note here is noted in all the Spacehijackers photos. Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) serves as a constant reminder to Londoners that they are being watched. Bentham’s Tower no longer serves as metaphor for modern living but is enacted each day on the streets of London. Most heavily trafficked areas in London are surveyed by CCTV cameras. Ladybird takes the liberty to claim CCTV cameras engage in more than what the government admits to:

I wouldn't be at all surprised to find out that CCTV enabled businesses to study peoples' shopping habits or the way they use space, as a means for advertisers or large shopping chains to maximise profit in relation to the way that this space is used.<sup>50</sup>

Robin continues on with what at first appear like paranoid observations of London’s system of citizen-surveillance, providing statistics that solidify fear in the observations of those wary of Big Brother.

## Robin

---

<sup>48</sup> Ladybird’s notes on her photos.

<sup>49</sup> Ladybird’s notes on her photos.

<sup>50</sup> Ladybird’s notes on her photos.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) arose numerous times as one of the most dubious practices in London. According to Robin, “the UK has 25% of the world’s CCTV cameras.” Robin took a photo of the Oxford Street CCTV cameras and described it as the most sinister of the CCTV systems in London. He writes:

the Oxford Street system isn’t however a simple CCTV system. It has facial recognition software that can scan crowds for known trouble makers and then follow them as they pass through the system. Guilty until proven innocent? Alongside this it scans car number plates to check then against a database.<sup>51</sup>

Robin touts another form of surveillance however, much to his own surprise.

At the end of his notes on bicycle cops Robin exclaims, “Wow, I didn’t think I would be writing a nice thing about the police in the book!”<sup>52</sup> His admiration of a group he normally considers a foe is due to the environmentally-friendly mode of transportation they elect to use. Robin, the constant historian, whether describing the genealogy of the Spacehijackers or his photos, includes a bit of background about the police on bicycles. Ken Livingston first introduced bicycle police to London to replace the motorbike police who previously patrolled critical mass bike rides. This appropriation of the mode of transportation they are attempting to control has, in Robin’s opinion, led to a “whole team of environmentally-friendly police who in general are quite supportive of the critical rides and bikes in general helping to promote cycling in a car-fume filled capital city.”<sup>53</sup> London also now has bicycle ambulance personnel who not only use the alternative transportation advocated by the critical mass bikers but are also headed up by an ex-BMX professional biker.<sup>54</sup>

In order to fully understand Robin’s next observation the origins of the Spacehijackers must be revealed. The idea for the Spacehijackers came to Robin as a result of his “trouble”-making, skateboarding, in art school. According to Robin, he and some friends got a kick out of

---

<sup>51</sup> Robin’s notes on his photographs.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

“misappropriating public space” and “using spaces in different ways.”<sup>55</sup> This turned into a turf war, skateboarders versus police in the City of London, and led Robin and his friends to learn the different laws between London and the City of London. He states:

When you skate sets of steps aren't just sets of steps you can jump them; it's all sorts of stuff like that...a lot of it grew out of that and finding out weird laws in The City... they've got a by-law there to make it illegal to skateboard. It's the only place in the whole of London and they got these...brass lines on the floor that denote who owns the space. There is this really good place to skate near Liverpool St.... You just go down there on Sunday and just spend all day just jumping on either side of the line depending on which security guard is there and it's really good fun and they just get infuriated... and they know that the skaters know. So we got to finding out weird laws about how the city works, it kinda developed out of that and reading up on Situationist stuff.<sup>56</sup>

The next few of Robin observations certainly stem from these experiences and specifically address the competition between resister of dominant modes of operating in the city and those who wish to eliminate resistance and uphold the dominant modes of operation.

With the keen eye of a skateboarder looking for new surface to skate on, Robin notices the waxed-up ledge by Bank tube station. He informs me that skaters rub candles on these ledges in order to make them easier to slide on. Robin states, “It always cheers me up when going to a new town or city to see waxed up blocks of curb stones as you know skateboarders are in the area.” He enjoys it so much that he took another photo, this time in the Docklands he speaks about below, noting that the presence of skaters in such a heavily policed area puts “a little chink in the armor of the pristine image of the Docklands,” and therefore makes Robin very happy. The anti-skateboarding devices present near St. Paul's Cathedral, which Robin calls “blobs,” displease Robin. The blobs are affixed to a marble block with no need for waxing due to the slipperiness of marble and are a new development in London. Robin informs me that “there are now all manner of devices, little things urban planners use to deter skateboarding including excessive use of blind paving bobbles before certain sets of steps.”<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Robin, June 20, 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Robin, June 20, 2004.

<sup>57</sup> Robin's notes on his photos.

Robin attacks other urban planners' visions of a future London when he attacks urban regeneration in his photos, but first he begins by echoing Ladybird's observations in a photo of the apartment they share. She writes, "The rent is cheap, the land lord is great and the architecture is a million miles away from the ugly, overpriced housing that is shooting up all around us in the East End."<sup>58</sup> Robin agrees, "My house is ace! It's a lovely old building which is just on the edge of the city and has survived the gentrification and regeneration of the area."

Spitalfields Market takes the brunt of Robin's anger against urban regeneration and is the focus of his first three photos. He informs me of the history of the market in his notes on his photos, writing that the market originated in 1683. He also informs me that, "a couple of years ago the powers that be decided that Spitalfields was in need of regeneration." He continues that "this apparently involve[d] knocking down 2/3 of an historic market, building a big glass office block and hiking the rent for everyone to out price all of the small shops."<sup>59</sup> It is the loss of history that Robin finds so alienating in Spitalfields' case. He concludes that "Spitalfields is a great example of the wrongs that urban regeneration and big business can do to a community," because "in come Starbucks and friends, the area gets cleaned up and a piece of London history is lost."<sup>60</sup>

Robin lives near and holds his studio space in The Docklands which over the last decade underwent some of the most intense gentrification in London. Robin surmises that The Docklands:

Start[ed] off as a bit of a flop and now [is] one of the financial centers of Europe. The Docklands is the epitome of capitalist architecture, a bit like La Defence in Paris; every building, tree, and blade of grass has been tightly designed. When visiting this place you feel as if all humanity has been sucked out. Armies of suited businessmen mix with armies of construction workers and security guards. The place is a marble and glass empire showing off its riches with tightly controlled landscaping and no room for

---

<sup>58</sup> Ladybird's notes on her photos.

<sup>59</sup> Robin's notes on his photos.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

anything except business. New high rise luxury 5 star apartments are springing up left, right and centre.<sup>61</sup>

It is the contrast to surrounding areas that really bothers Robin, the stark difference in economic security reified by urban planners in the case of The Docklands. He writes:

The most depressing thing is that no more than a couple of minutes away (in any direction), sits London's poorest and most underdeveloped area. The East End Council Estates and Housing Burroughs receive next to nothing whilst the global banks live the high life just across the road.<sup>62</sup>

Robin concludes his photos regarding urban regeneration with a photo of battleships and new developments in The Docklands. His words detail his disgust and humor, "I thought these two photos summed up a lot what we are against." He continues, "First there is a British battleship moored up as if it is protecting the Docklands and all of the money from outsiders and then just down the river are a couple of new developments hoping to cash in on the spoils." Robin feels this exemplifies "capitalism's whole global outlook."<sup>63</sup>

There are spaces and places in London that Robin enjoys. It fits in line with the Spacehijackers' love of drinking that one of these places is The Grapes Pub, a historically listed building in Limehouse Basin, once again near Robin's studio. Robin enjoys the history of the building and the preservation thereof. He includes in his photo notes that Dickens wrote about the pub in "Our Mutual Friend," and that the pub "has a long and sometimes unsavory history."<sup>64</sup> The fact The Grapes Pub withstood the last decade of redevelopment in The Docklands further secures the place as unalienated in Robin's eyes.

Other places of business are not so lucky to register as fondly to Robin. Reluctantly he writes, "I had promised myself that I wouldn't put a picture of Starbucks in here as it is too obvious. However I think that they need to be included." Carnaby Street, a former bastion of counter-culture cool is now littered with businesses that rank as wretched as Starbucks in Robin's

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Robin's notes on his photographs.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

eyes. A few of these Carnaby Street stores employ tactics so offensive to him that he includes their practices in his notes. Especially offensive to Robin is the previously-detailed co-optation of radical art, graffiti in particular. Puma not only employed (former) political graffiti artist, Banksy, to collaborate on a campaign to sell sneakers with his name on them, but also uses graffiti strategically placed on sidewalks and buildings to promote its label. According to Robin, this guerrilla advertising is a practice of Nike, Adidas, Gossard, and Stella Artois also. He asks, “When will big companies learn to stick to the already omnipotent advertising they have, instead of spreading into graffiti and street culture?” Robin believes this is an attempt to “lose their untrendy-capitalist look and appear ‘down with the kids.’”<sup>65</sup>

One of Robin’s photos is of this co-optation by Napster, summing up the elimination of uncommodified spaces.<sup>66</sup> Robin informs that “Napster, previous wild child of the internet and top illegal file sharing site, has now become a legitimate company after the brand was bought by Roxie.”<sup>67</sup> He then continues in his notes on his photos that Napster, “in a move to pretend they are still naughty and ‘street,’ have obviously decided that graffiti on our pavements is the way forward. After having signed deals with all five major record companies, this brand is still trying to pretend to be an anti-corporate illegal site.”

In a move illustrating Robin’s observation of the public’s conformability level, or lack thereof, he lists one capitalist project as unalienating. Agent Provocateur in The City of London wins Robins’ approval due to the contradictions it provokes with its presence in a space typically reserves for business. He notes, “Although city folk all dress the same for work in their dull and dreary suits, with ‘crazy’ ties, it really cheers me up to see a saucy underwear shop here as it means that there is a [life] in the dull robots yet.”

One of Robin’s last photos harkens back on the same childhood games and rules that lead to the connection between skateboarding and the politics of public space. This time, however, Robin connects roads with three drains and The Docklands. He fills me in on the childhood

---

<sup>65</sup> Robin’s notes on his photos.

<sup>66</sup> Even if these spaces do verge on thievery. This is a thesis grounded in anarchy after all and anarchist history involves many debates over whether or not stealing from capitalists is unethical or not.

<sup>67</sup> Robin’s notes on his photos.

mythology where he grew up that claimed roads with three drains in a row as bad luck. His notes read, “Where I grew up we used to have a superstition that treading on sets of two drains in the floor was lucky, but that sets of three drains were to be avoided like the plague! This road has more sets of triple drains in it than any other road I have seen.” He feels it is “quite fitting for the area.” It is additionally a quite fitting observation on the part of a man who’s group originated out of childhood games and perpetuates through urban mythology. More on the connection between urban mythology and the success of the Spacehijackers is discussed in the fourth chapter.

## **Ben Invasion**

Corporations such as McDonald’s and Burger King are highlighted in Ben Invasion’s work as well. He finds the marketing strategies of these companies particularly outrageous. He identifies McDonald’s “trying to sell junk food as health food” and its “corporate brand re-alignments to boost profit” alienating in a photo of a McDonald’s/England Football/Pepsi advert in a McDonald’s window.<sup>68</sup> In his photo notes, under the heading “The Corporates,” wrote that he despised “the fact that every high street in Britain looks the same has the same chain store shops.” Invasion, with his long blond dreadlocks, is the most outwardly “hippie” looking of those who participated in taking photos, though I can guess this observation might offend. He works with Mike Cupcake, another Spacehijacker, as a DJ duo and, at the time of our interview, recently DJ-ed a cinema squat party highlighting their friend’s films. Arthur invited me to this event before I met Invasion and Cupcake further leading me to believe that the art world I chose to research in London was both larger and more incestuous than I ever suspected.

Invasion’s notes and comments on his photos mostly fell under general topics such as the abovementioned “Corporates,” and other generalized categories like “Religion.” Mainstream and corporate religion, by which he means the conversion of what was once “holy” into product, are alienating to him. A photo of a sign hanging over a building in a lower-income area of London reading “Jesus Christ is the Lord: Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, The Church of Strong Prayer,” represents the alienating nature of mainstream religion to Invasion.

---

<sup>68</sup> Ben Invasion’s notes on his photos.



In two photos of a parking lot, Invasion highlights both his irritation at both unenvironmentally-friendly transportation and overdependence on it.<sup>69</sup> While this observation falls in line with his hippie appearance, Invasion moves outside of stereotypes with his photos taken during the Legalize Cannabis March and Festival in June 2004. At first I thought the picture perhaps dealt with a desire to legalize cannabis, which is a sentiment shared by many on the left including Invasion as demonstrated by his attendance of the festival. The photo he chose to take at the festival however illustrates a different point. In his notes describing photos of posters that read, “Smoke Bush Not Iraq,” “Don’t Just Legalize It Utilize It,” and “The Only Thing That Can Save Our Planet,” Invasion highlights the apathy he feels characterizes this sort of “politics.”<sup>70</sup> He feels so strongly about the alienation imposed by self-interest guised as politics that his pictures include three photos of this festival.

Media pressure “to look better,” especially for women to look better, bothers Invasion and is illustrated in his photo of an advert littering the visual environment of London, a photo I saw at nearly every bus and tube station. The photo is of a woman holding her jeans out showing that she lost weight; it reads “You could be up to 1 size less.” It advertises Retinol Body Molding, a body lotion designed to somehow sink into a person’s skin and make them smaller.<sup>71</sup>

Issues such as social control and gentrification bring Invasion’s observations further in line with the other Spacehijackers. His first photo regarding Closed Circuit Television is of a sign reading, “CCTV Cameras are in operation on this station monitored and recorded by British Transport Police on a 24 hours basis.”<sup>72</sup> Invasion writes in his notes that this “constant surveillance” is designed to “[incite] paranoia to ensure conformity.” This paranoia is perpetuated by the cameras and television screens used for surveillance at tube stations that additionally appear in his photos. His photos of gentrification focus on new, monotonous condominium developments interspersed between and around the low-income areas where Invasion photographed the “mainstream” religious establishments discussed above.

---

<sup>69</sup> Ben Invasion’s notes on his photos.

<sup>70</sup> Ben Invasion’s notes on his photographs.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

Invasion's focus on "personal finances" in his photos strays from other Spacehijacker's feelings on alienation in London and is particularly interesting in that it highlights the increasing debt in England. According to Invasion, the amount of personal loans taken out by individuals is increasing quickly. He blames this on "companies' marketing opportunities to spend money as an event" with banks advertising instant loans.<sup>73</sup> This encouragement of debt is entangled with the desire to consume the gentrified condos and salvation for sale all over Ben Invasion's neighborhood.<sup>74</sup>

## **Gender Performance and Gendered Performance Art**

The observations of the Spacehijackers whose photos are outlined above speak loudly as to what the group members find alienating and enlightening on their everyday journeys through London. I am concerned about and interested in the omissions that glare at me from between their words. My particular interest in omissions regarding gender, and the performance thereof, and the possibility that the Spacehijackers' performance art eclipses gender is rooted in my studies of Feminist Geography and my own reluctance to participate in public performance art. Though I am not remotely shy and I share similar observations regarding alienation and freedom in the city of London, I still hesitate to initiate similar actions. I argue in this thesis that public performance art is one of the most effective ways to combat alienation and consider myself an ally but I wonder how to overcome certain socialization practices telling me to keep quiet in public and keep myself small. The Spacehijackers are anything but small and quiet in public and what follows is an attempt to work through a possible relationship between the absences in their observations and gender.

The only observation at the scale of the female body concerns the Euro 2004 soccer game. Ben Invasion discusses his photo of a women's t-shirt that reads "Come on Lads...Score with Me" in a store window when he writes that he finds the "social/cultural tendency (pressure)

---

<sup>73</sup> Ben Invasion's notes on his photos.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Ben Invasion, June 18, 2004.

for women to self-objectify themselves” alienating.<sup>75</sup> The observation changes greatly when the words “pressure” and “tendency” are interchanged. It goes, respectively, from a feminist statement critiquing heterosexism to a comment blaming women for objectifying themselves. If the word “pressure” were not written in parentheses over the word “tendency” as opposed to crossing out the latter word and writing in the second, I might consider this a misspeaking.

The lack of identification of misogynist sites of alienation within the photography project surprised me. Some anti-capitalists only focus on economics, and then there are those who focus on all issues on the radical left. It is interesting the connections drawn by the Spacehijackers between the environment and anti-capitalism. Perhaps it is due to a Situationist-influenced compulsion to constantly observe one’s surroundings and distort, reinvent, and at times ignore scale that the Spacehijackers ignore such a small scale thing as bodies occupying space. Arthur was the only Spacehijacker who really focused on bodies in the city when he discussed with me his distaste for people who walk poorly in public.<sup>76</sup> As artists putting on performances in public spaces like streets, parks, and public buildings and very public, private spaces like Starbucks, malls, and office buildings, I wonder how much of the relationship between this ignorance of feminist issues and the scale of the body relates to the Spacehijackers artistry of occupying and drawing attention to themselves in public space. For the time that the action they are involved in occurs, the members of the group are the focal point of other urbanites around them. The Spacehijackers transcend gender roles within the space of their performance but are they able to do this by ignoring differential gendering between men and women? Similarly, does this ignorance or evasion exclude women from participating in the Spacehijackers’ actions?

The question then becomes one of whether or not the Spacehijackers are ignoring the masculinism embodied in all modern architecture and urban planning designs/regimes and therefore revolutionizing the role of the individual within revanchist space; or are they simply a predominantly male group occupying public and private space in the way they have historically? Does public performance on the part of these (mostly) men who are not acknowledging their membership in a dominating group, whose very presence in certain places at certain times can

---

<sup>75</sup> Ben Invasions Photo notes.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Arthur.

often lead to the exclusion of women and or gender-queer individuals, actually share an air of authority with the very planning regimes and occupations of space they critique? Would a room full of mostly men be as likely to watch a video of a woman eating coins, shitting them out, and later spending them in a short film called “Giving Them Back Their Shit?”

I almost just wrote, “Would a woman want to do that to some innocent worker for one of the corporate chains anti-capitalists recently placed on the ‘Evil Empire’ list?” I hate this notion that gender isn’t variant inter and intra biological sex. I do not attempt to reify gender binaries and biological-sex related performances here. I only hope to open up a discussion within my work as to whether or not this form of engaging with alienated subjects in public space in order to reclaim this space is somehow gender-privileged as to who gets to occupy these spaces as both interactor and interatee. Much work has been done about the relationship between public space and the presence of biological women and men that supports men’s ability to move easier through public space. DOMOSH AND SEAGER. Research on the presence and changing roles of lesbian women in public space FADERMAN contradict the notion that only men used to occupy public space; at the same time, if it is assumed that lesbian women vary outside of gender normatives more frequently than non-lesbian women, a relationship between gender performance and occupancy in public space arises that is very interesting. But not all biologically male bodies travel through public space as easily as those taken as the modicum of what is male. Gay men, flamboyant men, smaller men, effeminate men, transmen to name a few, need to operate in space differently than the “male” who occupies space so easily.

So who is this male center that all “other” experiences in public space are compared to? Are the Spacehijackers reclaiming, reproducing, or revolting against this center? What is to be said about the presence of Ladybird and other, non-core female members of the group? Ladybird’s presence is incredibly revolutionary in that she refuses dominant identities ascribed to her by outside influences such as the predominantly-male art world and society. She, along with other female members of the Spacehijackers, not only challenge alienated space but also my above-proposed assumption that males occupy reclaimed public and subverted private space easier than females. As I analyze the photos and actions of the Spacehijackers I turn to these questions of gender and wish I would have focused more on issues of gender performance within

their performance art. I hope to explore this and the observations of females engaged by the Spacehijackers at a later date. Do female-identified onlookers experience challenges to their Spacehijacker-assigned alienation differently than male-identified onlookers? I move away from the plethora of questions that arise within my research and accept that I need to conduct further research in order to address these questions. I turn toward the actions of the Spacehijackers in Chapter Three to address the questions originally put forth in this thesis.

## Chapter Three: This is What Subversion Looks Like

*“By virtue of the resulting mobile spaces of play, and by virtue of freely chosen variations in the rules of the game, the independence of places will be rediscovered without any new exclusive tie to the soil, and thus too the authentic journey will be restored to us, along with authentic life understood as a journey containing its whole meaning within itself.”*

*-Guy Debord (1994: 126)*

*“Revolutionary urbanists will not limit their concern to the circulation of things, or to the circulation of human beings trapped in a world of things. They will try to break these topological chains, paving the way with their experiments for a human journey through authentic life.”*

*-Debord (1959)*

### Masculinist Modes of Excluding Experience: Opening Up the Symbolic

While a body of relevant social movements' research on radical activism grows, it focuses on social movements' symbolic and ritualistic actions and fails to address attempts at rearranging the material and psychogeographical aspects of the city. It is not enough to look at actions as symbolic and ritualistic if the Spacehijackers perceive themselves as creating a new way of living everyday life, existing in the spaces of the city, and envisioning the future. The space perceived, hijacked, and idealized by the Spacehijackers must be understood through their words and goals. The actions undertaken by the Spacehijackers aim to “reclaim urban space for the pleasure of those who actually live there,” just as Deron Albright (2003) argues the Situationists attempted to in their strive toward unitary urbanism.

Albright's essay “Tales of the City: Applying Situationist Social Practice to the Analysis of the Urban Drama” and *Theory of the Derive*, a collection of texts by the Situationist International (SI), offer a way of approaching these questions through an analysis of the Situationists' actions and projects as well as a vocabulary with which to approach answering these questions. Albright concerns himself more with the theoretical background that informed the Situationists than with their activities, as do I. I place my emphasis on the activities of the Spacehijackers, using the theories and vocabulary of past situationist endeavors while

recognizing, like Lukacs and Debord respectively, that in order to achieve radical social change there can be no separation of action from theory or art from life. David Pinder and Eric Swyngdegouw (in addition to Albright) analyze historical accounts of the SI and its endeavors at detournement in order to achieve unitary urbanism. I seek a current example of this process in order to understand the way in which self-identified anarchists use detournement to rebel against the commodification and alienation of everyday life.

In this chapter I share the group's actions at subverting the spectacle as they identify it and fighting for the world they desire. I employ a Situationist vocabulary<sup>77</sup> to explain their actions in addition to their own words given to me in interviews and/or writing, via the Spacehijackers' writings on their website, and through my own participation in actions.

### **Futility or Constant Inventiveness?**

*Me: "If we start to get really scared that everything is going to get co-opted then stuff doesn't get made anymore. How do you resolve between the two?"*

*Arthur: "I can't consider that sort of recuperation. It just doesn't enter into it for me. I know it's going to happen. It just means that you can't stay still, which I'm OK with. I don't want to do the same thing all the time."*

The Diesel and BoxFresh examples in Chapter One addressed the dilemma regarding the co-optation of resistance. The question arose as to what the negation of the predicate by the subject within a dialectics of resistance really means when the subject switches from alienation to redemption through consumption of image to compounded alienation and the predicate transforms from advert to mode of resistance and back again to advert. These questions are addressed throughout this chapter using the Spacehijackers' actions to explore how activists/artists attempt to subvert and transform geographies of alienation through everyday actions and rituals. I can then assess the effectiveness of the mode of subversion the Spacehijackers engage with in order to challenge the spectacle in the final chapter. Additionally, other examples of the Spacehijackers' actions that arose during interviews are included in this chapter to highlight the

---

<sup>77</sup> See Appendix II with definitions.

reclamation of everyday spaces and lived life within London. Evidence of the changing perceptions of participants in the Spacehijackers' actions and the dissemination of these changed perception is revealed both within this chapter and the next.

The Spacehijackers are keenly aware of the ability of the spectacle to assume the identity of its former opposition. One interviewee noted the group experienced the co-optation of its most notorious event, the Circle Line Party II. The first Circle Line Party gained notoriety through stories on the internet, 'zines, and by word of mouth despite an attendance eclipsed by the second party. For the second party six-hundred partiers showed up once again in business attire to fool the authorities and boarded the Tube's Circle Line. Once the carriage moved safely underground out of earshot from Tube workers, the riders stripped their intentionally easy to change garb for party clothes and the music started. Tequila bars appeared along with sound systems playing dance music, nude dancers, gels to color the lights of the carriages, and other decorations. The group went undetected until one of the last stops in the circle when the police detected the mobile party. Amused by the antics of the culture jammers and in awe of the attendance and lack of appall on the part of "regular" travelers, the police allowed them to finish up their ride and showed appreciation of the lengths organizers had taken to make sure clean-up occurred after the event. Organizers state in true situationist-style that:

The plan for the party was to create an expression of freedom, a protest against the oppressive, repressive, war mongering policies of greedy white men that want to rule the world. An attempt to promote DIY culture in an age of rampant consumerism. A space for interaction between people, away from the clutches of Capitalism, and two fingers up at the constant clampdown on civil liberties and un-commodified fun.<sup>78</sup>




---

<sup>78</sup><https://spacehijackers.org>.



Apparently Coca-Cola disregarded the Spacehijackers statement of purpose for the party.

According to Arthur:

About 6 months after the last circle line party there was a Coke ad in which a guy gets on the tube and cracks a coke and all of a sudden there is music and everyone is dancing and stuff and then he runs out and luckily the tube pulls into a station and he steps off and everything is dead quite and he gets another can and the party starts up again.<sup>79</sup>

## Origins and Background

I revealed a small picture of the origins of the Spacehijackers in the last chapter. Robin takes responsibility and the accompanying accolades and reprimands for the Spacehijackers when he states, “I’m kinda the instigator of it all.” He does not however have the ego of Debord and acknowledges that the group has “kinda developed now into to a really nice, big group of people who do all this stuff.” I failed to realize the artistic roots of my research subject when I undertook working with the Spacehijackers. The naming of their actions as “performance art” did not occur to me until interviewing Robin. During these interviews he revealed to me that the Spacehijackers first started as his final-year thesis in art school. Robin chose to morph his passion for street-based performance into a project hard to hold in any museum. The inability of this form of performance art to be contained within museums and galleries causes some conflict between those in the London art scene who wish to rein the group into their confines.<sup>80</sup>

In the past, however, the Spacehijackers hosted events in museums and in galleries, mostly for financial purposes to obtain the needed funds for continuing the project. In order to obtain funding they also collaborated with the Institute for Contemporary Art on the “Holding Your Breath and Not Touching the Floor Tour.” This led to an increase in visibility in the Spacehijackers and therefore increased participation in actions. Out of this action new, younger members joined and created a new set of unwritten rules of behavior for the group. With the

---

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Arthur, June 4, 2004.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with Robin, June 20, 2004.

presence of teenage women in the actions, the behavior of the usually rambunctious, drunken troupe, changed.<sup>81</sup>

The time I spent in London coincided with the final-year theses art show at the university most of the Spacehijackers I worked with attended. During our failed attempt at a roof-top picnic, I chanced a look at London's newest and brightest entries into its art scene. It is interesting to note that the project Robin started turned into the subject matter for other theses at the university. Calf's final project focused on the Circle Line Party II. He filmed the event and morphed it into an art video he proudly displayed. Litost, also a student at this art university, turned his observations of the Spacehijackers' larger goal into a zine called "Look Left and Right," though his thesis focused on his fashion creations. It is his focus on fashion that perhaps brings him into conflict with the group at large. He chooses to reform from within the larger art structure (for him the fashion world) that the Spacehijackers rebel against and hope to create spaces outside of. More on this disagreement and how it fuels the group appears in the next chapter.

Robin started the group in 1999 with the first Circle Line Party. From this the group expanded and formed networks with other artists in London working on similar reclamations and subversions of space. In London I attended two events in collaborations with other artists. I detail these events in the next chapter because they illustrate the networks forming in London around issues of public versus private space and offer proof to the life-altering experience of participating in or witnessing these events. The first occurred in Birmingham, the Urban D-Tour, and the second showcased/recapped the event of the Urban D-Tour and welcomed in the arrival of Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping. I diverge from these actions here to give a glimpse of Spacehijacker events as described by participating Spacehijackers.

## **Piracy and Other Hijacking Hijinks**

It comes as no surprise to me that this thesis focuses on a group who first caught my attention due to its almost incessant need to dress in costume. I like costumes, but I *love* pirates. To me piracy is the hijacking of what was never the person it was stolen from's in the first place.

---

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Robin, June 20, 2004.

Pirates, particularly female pirates, exhibited Situationist behavior long before the likes of Guy Debord. In the late 1600's Anne Bonny and Mary Read took over male-staffed ships in the seas near the Bahamas by jumping aboard and flashing the men their breasts while the others in their gang took the men onboard by surprise. The women found this humorous and empowering as did those who perpetuated the gruesome stories of these ship-hijacking women. They never believed the goods they pirated belonged to those they stole them from. The Situationists never directly pay homage to the legacy of pirating but the Spacehijackers do, both in their use of shock-related humor to hijack misappropriated space and in the costumes they choose to do this in.

In Chapter Two, the Spacehijackers identify many spaces stolen from the people of London by those who rule capital in the capital. The Spacehijackers act as pirates of sorts, hijacking these spaces back in order to create more of the places they believe lead to a freer way of living in the city. Robin mentions The Docklands numerous times in his photos. The Docklands serve as a haven for pirate-themed actions. In the Limehouse Basin, the area of water surrounding The Docklands, many concrete "islands" break up the docking areas.

The Spacehijackers claimed one of these islands in 2002 as their own after it came to their "attention that slap bang in the centre of the docklands in London, was an unused, uninhabited island. Surrounded by luxury flats and expensive boats we could claim the island and exist as a community of cutthroats and scoundrels."<sup>82</sup> The group of pirates scoped out the island to assess what they needed for their reclamation event. They decided on a boat to ferry attendees, a sound system, a rope to get up onto the concrete, some food, and of course, rum. The



Spacehijackers quickly reveled in their idea to go off-land when a police officer came by to reprimand them, realized the boat police needed to attend to the mischief, and then left before

---

<sup>82</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

putting himself through the hassle of contacting the branch of the police dealing with The Thames. The Spacehijackers' desire to add fun and a theme to their act of dissent against the disused spaces of gentrification creates a new foray into urban living that the authorities fail to control. The story of the event on their web-site notes that "not since the 1700's had the docklands hosted such a motley crew."<sup>83</sup>

Police officers also visited the following year when the Spacehijackers hosted a Pirate Rum Social on their island. The hijackers again intended to remind residents, temporary occupants, and finders out that the area, "once the home of pirates, smugglers, and highwaymen of the seas...is now the weekday residence of finance managers, futures market traders and other such boring city types." In the process of their claiming "the land back in the name of piracy, rum, and dancing," the Spacehijackers attracted the attention of the police. According to the group, "word had obviously spread about our hotbed of international bandits," and Pirate Boblonsky, the Spacehijackers' police liaison, communicated in an exaggerated pirate voice<sup>84</sup> to the police that this island belonged to the Spacehijackers. The police asked him not to set fire to anything and they went laughingly on their way. A storm came in and the Pirate Rum Social moved to a place Robin identified in his photos, The Grapes Pub; a place with pirate roots "and a home of many a drunken sailor over the years."<sup>85</sup>

Two years passed before the Spacehijackers resumed their roles as pirates. This time they donned pirate gear for the purposes of Anarchitecture Week, their response to London's Architecture Week. They write:

Anarchitecture week is a celebration of resistance to corporate occupation of space. It celebrates the misuses, subversions, and hijacks of contemporary architecture in a fun and informative way, exploring architecture and the built environment from the perspective of those who try to reclaim control over their own environment.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

<sup>84</sup> I wish I had time in this thesis to explore why impersonations of pirates are the way they are both in England and in the United States, but unfortunately, matey, I cannot.

<sup>85</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

<sup>86</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

To add a little finesse to the week the Spacehijackers decided to move from their usual island to a different island in the city, one “not in the sea, but surrounded by traffic (steel sharks).”<sup>87</sup> The recounting of the night’s events is a bit hard to follow due to the copious amounts of rum consumed by the pirate-agents. The decipherable portions of the night include the presence of a wireless sound system, around 200 pirates dancing on an island in the middle of a heavily-trafficked area in London, and the facilitation of a lesbian pirate wedding.

Certain Spacehijacker actions provide me with unlimited amounts of happiness even though I did not directly participate in them. The Halloween Masked Climbers action is just such an event, and it also involves costumes. I often wondered how the fun we had could find its way into the lives of the business people who worked in The City of London. In the next chapter I detail the impact the Spacehijackers’ have on onlookers and those involved in the networks of urban mythology that permeate London and change people’s perception of public space. The Halloween Hijinks and the Masked Climber serve as actions that not only subvert dominant modes of behavior in cities, but also leave a reminder for the workers in the buildings the Spacehijackers play on at night. This invites unlikely participants into the networks of storytelling and urban mythology that surround the Spacehijackers.

In late 2004, according to the Spacehijackers’ website, a Masked Climber appeared in The City of London. This climber’s photo appeared at underpasses, banks, police checkpoints, Starbucks, tube stations, “lunchtime sandwich spots,” and under benches. In the spirit of this climber, the Spacehijackers donned costumes appropriate for Halloween and appropriated the private property of The City of London. To make sure news of the action spread beyond just the Spacehijackers, the group followed the lead of the Masked Climber and left photos to entertain the daytime occupants of these spaces.

Both Mike Cupcake and Ben Invasion spoke with pride and amusement about their participation in Santacon, an event in 2001 where over 50 Spacehijackers dressed up like Santa Claus and proceeded to cause trouble dressed as the happiest man on earth. The Santas first entered a department store looking to get the rosy cheeks Santa is known for only to be kicked out of the store by security after a few Santas received make-up from some amused workers. They

---

<sup>87</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

then moved onto Oxford Street and to a tube station to use the bathrooms. Cupcake and Invasion told of taking over the Tate Museum of Modern Art in London in a piece of performance art targeted at the heart of the art world.<sup>88</sup> The actions listed below deal less with the art world and more with confronting the observations of the Spacehijackers in the third chapter.

## Reclaiming as Reacting

Many of the actions the Spacehijackers hosted over the last six years are aimed directly at the alienation observed in the photos described in Chapter Three. The group's "London Skateboarding Lessons" address Robin's observations of control mechanisms geared at skateboarders. On the day the group chose to give their lessons it rained hard in London. According to the Spacehijackers, "we realised that Richard Robin Seifert (the architect concerned) had designed it as a wet weather skateboard oasis, with all of the best parts to skate (the blocks, stairs, kerbs & flatland) all undercover."<sup>89</sup> The city is the Spacehijackers' opportunistic playground and the skateboard is their method of alternative transportation. Architects design the city for them and their actions are designed to inform city dwellers of this point.

The "Holding Your Breath and Not Touching the Floor Tour" discussed earlier aims at subverting the modes of walking in the city and changes the way Londoners perceive their movements in the city at the same time that it draws attention to the public's constant obedience to spatial norms. This in conjunction with the "City Pedestrian Scheme" and the "Brixton Tube Pedestrian Scheme" responds to Arthur's observation about people walking poorly in



public despite constant dictation as to how they are supposed to be walking. The Holding Your Breath Tour had two basic rules, 1)

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Ben Invasion and Mike Cupcake, June 15, 2004

<sup>89</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

Avoid touching the floor at all times, and 2) Hold your breath if you touch the floor. The premise is to subvert dominant modes of walking in London. While leading the tour, Robin also informed the group of hidden treasures in the city. The Spacehijackers detail a bit of the event on their website:

We traveled along a wall, over another set of steps, along another wall, over some portaloos and onto the side of the cabinet office. This luckily was built rather like a ladder with excellent hand and foot grooves. Eventually we made it round to our first port of call with a view to Trafalgar Sq. Learning about hidden treasure and the smallest police station in the world, we then held our breath and dashed through Admiralty Arch and back to the flowerbeds.<sup>90</sup>

In an interview with Arthur he notes this as one of the most successful events hosted by the Spacehijackers during his tenure with the group. He also includes that this is one of the events that changed the way participants viewed their movements within the city.<sup>91</sup>

Both the “City Pedestrian Scheme” and the “Brixton Tube Pedestrian Scheme” are also designed to alert Londoners of the constant dictation of their movement. This time the Spacehijackers teamed up with a camera crew to lend themselves some extra authority as they rerouted pedestrians’ walking. According to the Spacehijackers:

The plan was as follows, a white line would be stuck down the center of the pavement dividing it into two. At either end a red road sign would be placed informing pedestrians to keep left, this would be re-enforced by our official shouting through his megaphone at people who veered out of their lane. The TV crew would be stopping pedestrians at random and giving little interviews on their thoughts on the scheme. People entering the scheme would also be given an A5 flyer explaining how to walk and giving information as to why the scheme was being trialed.<sup>92</sup>

With the air of authority so essential to the group’s actions, the Spacehijackers proceeded to confuse, enrage, and direct travelers coming out of the tube stations. London tube station are filled with confusing directions as to which side of the aisle to walk on and which side of the

---

<sup>90</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Arthur, June 4, 2004

<sup>92</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

escalator to stand/walk on. Robin notes his amusement in an interview at how travelers who follow all the rules inside the tube station were enraged when told how to walk outside the station. The action illustrates which spaces Londoners are willing to be told what to do in and which spaces they consider free zones.

I asked Spacehijackers which events of theirs were the most “political” and in addition to the Boxfresh action many of the group agreed that the DSEi Arms Fair action proved political. During this action the Spacehijackers detoured the previous meaning of “arms” and brought with them to the Arms Fair, suitcases with prosthetic arms in them. The Spacehijackers website claims:

Our 'Arms Traders' were a funny play on words with the weapons of death, but they were also a reminder of the true nature of these weapons. A reminder of the pain and suffering that these companies and governments cause to actual people, not just statistics and 'collateral damage'. People will be killed with the weapons sold in the docklands, people will have arms and legs blown off. It is a vile event and we need to highlight this so that future events will be even less acceptable, and the organisers will have to look for even more remote and hidden places to ply their vulgar trade.<sup>93</sup>

They planned to set up shop with their baby-doll, nuclear war heads, etc. in order to challenge what they feel is the ludicrousness of a fair based around killing people.



<sup>93</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>



In addition to the scene the group caused, after the event they instigated an argument on a train filled with business people involved in the fair. In the focus group detailed in the next chapter, the group informed me of the real change they believed occurred in this space. According to Robin their train ride home turned into “a bunch of [the public] in a bus giving the arms dealers a bunch of shit.”<sup>94</sup> This all started with a few strategically placed comments just loud enough for the bus riders to hear. The combination of protestors and the Spacehijackers as protestors disguised as arms dealers proved volatile. The Spacehijackers’ website states:

We started up our obnoxious arms dealer routine letting everyone on the train know just how much we loved explosions, death and blood. The protestors on the train started ranting about how the arms dealers were responsible for making money on the back of an industry that kills people. That in the 1990's 90% of all war casualties were civilians, just like us on the train.

This catapulted everyday travelers to yell at the arms dealers for not caring about human life. The next action takes place in a more political space than a train but involves the individuals who make political decisions in Britain.

During my time in London the Spacehijackers planned a hostile takeover of Parliamentary toilets. For a group whose actions shy away from large protests but still focus on political issues, it is appropriate that the bathroom is the space the Spacehijackers chose to create political change. In this way they get the uninterrupted attention of the politicians and take over a space that matters to everyone. With much anger expressed toward the at-the-time current, war-mongering regime in England within the photography project, it is no surprise that the Spacehijackers chose to take over the bathrooms of Parliament. I did not participate in this event but detail it here as the last example in this chapter of the sort of actions the Spacehijackers undertake in London. The event involved one Spacehijacker getting the others on a special tour of Parliament so they could sneak “some messages, poems, thoughts and general mischief to the MP’s.”<sup>95</sup> The event went off without a hitch aside from the mishap during the security

---

<sup>94</sup> Robin, Focus Group Interview, June 21, 2004.

<sup>95</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

checkpoint where an agent's "Destroy Capitalism Now" sticker slipped out of his/her bag. The Spacehijackers write about the action on their website, stating:

Just as our tour was winding to a close we headed off to the loo and our Hijacking began. Splitting into groups, girls and boys, we headed into the MP's toilets and locked ourselves in the cubicles. Unwinding the toilet rolls we each pulled a number of secret messages printed on paper from our pockets. Winding the rolls back up we would place the messages into the roll at intervals so that future toilet goers would have fortune cookie style messages delivered as they cleaned.

The messages included tidbits of information, thoughts, and comments like, "I can still smell you, and you left the room;" "Calm down boys, don't get so stressed, sit in the cubicle and have a nice play with yourself, and the world will seem a nicer place;" "A man who, beyond the age of 26, finds himself on a bus can count himself as a failure'—Margaret Thatcher" and, my favorite, "I think that gay marriage is something that should be between a man and a woman'—Arnold Schwarzenegger." While some of these enlightening messages rolled up in toilet paper carry more political weight than others, they hold true to the absurdist nature of Situationist and proto-Situationist actions like those of the Spacehijackers. In the next and final chapter of this thesis, I analyze through theorists, my own observations, and the words of the Spacehijackers, just how effective actions like these are in changing people's perceptions and the way we live in cities.

## Chapter Four: This is What Resistance Looks Like

### Tall Tales: The Internet and Urban Mythology

Two existing approaches to understanding social movements peripherally address neo-situationist, anarchist activism like that of the Spacehijackers. Harry J. Elam (1997) and Bronislaw Szerszynski (2002) address the ritualistic and symbolic nature of social movements and how these actions produce effects on the consciousness, capacity for social action, and the actual collective action of those who partake in or witness them.<sup>96</sup> Elam (1997) contends in his book, *Taking it to the Streets*, that social protest theatre, specifically El Teatro Campesino and Black Revolutionary Theater, produces effects on the consciousness, capacity for social action, and the actual collective action of its audience through the acting group's ritual actions. I utilize these social movement theories to challenge the notion that the symbolic is not "real" or that all symbolic social movements can be lumped together. I additionally present evidence illustrating the Spacehijackers' ability to transform onlookers' perceptions of the everyday spaces they occupy through their use of performance art. Additionally, the lasting power of these actions depends on an urban mythology formed out of networks of storytelling that draw readers/listeners into the actions without ever participating in the actions.

Spacehijackers hold their own opinions about the symbolic/material divide. I asked one Spacehijacker his feelings on the division and he told me he thought the distinction failed to describe the Spacehijackers actions. I asked him if the Spacehijackers' actions changed the way the people viewed space or if the change only existed during the length of the action. He responded that it is "Definitely not the latter." He continued:

I get the distinction between symbolic and material actions. I think it's a theoretical construction that helps people analyze. I don't think that the Spacehijackers and some other groups necessarily effect direct material change and in the spaces that we pass through, we don't tear down the buildings that we climb on; it's not just limited to that effect. An action is not just happening now it happens before in the planning and you

---

<sup>96</sup> Elam, H. (1997). *Taking it to the streets : the social protest theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Szerszynski, B. (2002) "Ecological Rites: Ritual Action in Environmental Protest Events" *Theory, Culture and Society* 19, no. 3 (2002): 51-69

think about the issues and afterward you think about how you could have done it better. It could act as a provocation to people who just observed it to tell a story about it. It isn't then symbolic or material it was just there and it affected people's experience.<sup>97</sup>

Through my interviews with the group I realized the storytelling network arising from the Spacehijackers' events proved to be the crucial component of creating change with their actions. Often times the action itself does operate on "the level of everyday life" as Bronislaw Szerszynski argues below, but they also satisfy personal needs according to Arthur who notes that "most of it [the actions] is about keeping those sorts of issues in our own heads." The inadvertent effect of the everyday reclamation aimed at keeping thoughts in the heads of the planners is the network of dispersement that arises after an event.

Bronislaw Szerszynski (2002:51) analyzes environmental protest in his article "Ecological Rites: Ritual Action in Environmental Protest Events" and echoes Elam's approach to understanding ritualism, but combines this with an understanding of Manuel Castell's argument that "radical social movements operate largely at the level of symbol and meaning" focusing on "the level of everyday life." Szerszynski (2002:51) notes these "enclaves of experimentation, within which individuals do not so much satisfy personal needs," seek to "enact different forms of life, forms that rely on the contestation and altering of society's dominant codes."

Szerszynski (2002) purports that the environmental groups he focuses on do not fight for the accommodation of their interests by dominant powers or through the implementation of party politics, but operate as signs, symbols, and rituals for those outside of the movements to interpret. The interpreters of these ritualistic, symbolic acts, according to Elam (1997:11), are transformed into active bodies mobilized for "revolutionary activity outside the theater." The spaces of London colonized by consumerism are both the Spacehijackers' stage and the contested territory that they work to reclaim through symbolic, ritualistic actions.

These symbolic, ritualistic actions transform into something different when the media or the wheels of urban mythmaking get a hold of an event. According to Arthur, the Spacehijackers "hear about people who heard about stuff we've done. The cricket game seems to have taken on

---

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Arthur, June 4, 2004.

its own mythology, same with the circle line party. People heard and wonder when the next is.”

Robin brought up the notion of folk history in an interview stating:

The tube parties have kinda got this...they’re kinda becoming part of an underground culture. A lot of people know about the tube parties. That’s kinda the way a lot of them work [the events] is just through stories. It’s why the website is such an important thing because the actions probably only have a sort of limited audience by putting them on the website they become part of some sort of folk history or something.<sup>98</sup>

Arthur supported this statement in his interview when he answered a question of mine pertaining to the scale of the actions. I asked if he felt the actions are targeted just at the people involved in the action or if the city is intended to notice. He responded:

We know that while we are doing something it is really going to affect a limited number of people. The Circle Line Party is only a limited number of people until TV finds out about it and comes down with a camera crew and it gets much bigger, but even it is something like flying outside of Boxfresh. It goes up on the website and Naomi Klein notices it and puts it in a book or something. The event itself might not contain that much in terms of immediate experience but it gets documented either by us or by other people and that has its own life.<sup>99</sup>

I then asked Arthur if the group ever contacted the media intentionally. He told me that the most they ever did to attract the media involved making signs that read “NO POLICE AND NO MEDIA.” The police and media apparently failed to understand the signage and showed up.<sup>100</sup> This sort of humor in the advertising of events also arises in the stories about the events on the Spacehijackers’ website.

Robin maintains the Spacehijackers’ website, creates the games on it, and recaps the group’s events in the “Projects” section. The amount of detail and humor he puts into his project serves as testament to his love of the group and the necessity of storytelling as a way of communicating and compounding the social change resulting from his art. Every minute I spent with Robin, from hanging out in his and Ladybird’s apartment to participating in actions with

---

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Robin, June 20, 2004.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Arthur, June 4, 2004.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

him to interviewing him, proved entertaining. His ability to turn a phrase combined with his humor testifies to his talent as an entertainer. The way he works himself up discussing what impassions him occurs also in his writing. When detailing the group's pirate actions he writes sentences like: "Old sea dogs like ourselves know a thing or two about riding through storms, and so everyone was quick to button down the hatches, and get our merry brigade waterproof."<sup>101</sup> Simply telling a story without capturing the attention of the reader and drawing him or her into the action of the event fails to transform the tale from a simple story to a myth permeating both activist and artist communities. This mode of storytelling perpetuates the actions beyond the space in which the action occurred and contributes to the success and visibility of the Spacehijackers within London's art/activist scene.

### **Evidence: Urban D:Tour and Midnight Cricket**

*"People who went along [On the Holding Your Breath and Not Touching the Floor Tour] really talked about how they had a different perspective on the buildings and the areas that we passed through by virtue of having to climb on them. So it doesn't necessarily change the space for people who pass through it so much as change the way that the people pass through the space"*<sup>102</sup>

I claim that through the use of performance art the Spacehijackers transform people's perceptions of the everyday spaces they occupy. While I conducted research with the group in England I witnessed two events supporting this hypothesis. The first occurred during an event in Birmingham called Urban D:Tour. The Spacehijackers participated in this daylong event that illustrated the growing movement of socially conscious, performance art based work undertaken in public space in Britain. The Urban D:Tour, assembled by a group called Access To: Recycled Technology (A2:RT), featured performance artists from London and Birmingham and started out with a "Misguided Architectural Tour" hosted by A2:RT. The tour highlighted "the private masquerading as the public, the corporate as community, in a collective attempt to repopulate our

---

<sup>101</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Arthur, June 4, 2004. Here it is not the space that is changed but the mode of moving an unfixed body through space that changes. The body itself changes due its need to travel through ordinary spaces without touching the normal pathways and through the utilization of buildings, walls, and fences as the new pathways. This new movement is what changes the space.

experiences in the city.”<sup>103</sup> The tour guides pointed out the miniscule delineations between public and private space in Birmingham denoted by thin metal strips in the paved ground. They told anecdotes about doing Tai Chi on what looked like public land until a security guard ushered them out. The owner of the building witnessed this event and because he fancied himself a practitioner of all things “Eastern” allowed the tour guide/Tai Chi practitioners to continue to practice. The owner thought it added to the image of his building. The orchestrators of the tour also requested people to call and leave messages about their Birmingham memories, asking “Can memories of public space be channeled back into existence by the A2:RT architectural whirlwind?” They plan to create a map of memorialized public space online using these messages.

Robin from the Spacehijackers followed up the architectural tour with his own tour of the A-Z’s of Retail Trickery because as the brochure for the event notes, “The retail industry spends hard time and money into creating all sorts of devious little means to make you shop that bit extra.”<sup>104</sup> Robin took us through what he could of his alphabet of trickery making stops at a grocery store to draw attention to the back of the store placement of goods of high-necessity like bread and milk, the rounding of aisles so products are always in sight of the consumer, the different sizes of tiles with smaller tiles placed strategically in front of expensive goods to slow a shopper’s cart down, etc. Robin conducted this tour at The Bull Ring, Europe’s largest shopping mall.

An event called “Urban Decoy--a game of stealth...” illustrates most my claim that engaging consumers in the space of their consumption is the most effective way to wake them up to the contradictions within their cycle of alienation. The game, organized by My Dad’s Strip Club, involved ten participants entering Boot’s The Chemist to deplete the reserves of Urban Decay make-up. The organizer told them to go for an urban-camouflage look after which she released them into The Bull Ring to be hunted down and captured by the remaining Urban D-Tour participants. As we played the first round of the game a group of teenage boys started to linger around us to figure out what we were doing.

---

<sup>103</sup> A2:RT publication advertising the Urban D:Tour.

<sup>104</sup> A2:RT publication advertising the Urban D:Tour

When the organizer, along with a few Spacehijackers and myself, explained to them the point of the game, to reclaim the space they hung out in, they asked if they could join in. The group of teenage boys, otherwise spending their day off from school (the D:Tour occurred on a bank holiday) hanging out in the mall roaming from store to store, transformed into active participants in the game, smothering their faces with camouflage and running their hearts out. They told us afterwards that they planned on doing this with their friends and they did not know they could play games in the mall. The alienating space of consumption metamorphasized into an urban playground for the teens.

During my time in London I also participated in a game of Midnight Cricket in the City of London organized by the Spacehijackers. We met up at a pub in the financial district of London, the City of London, two hours before closing on a Friday evening—in cricket whites. We told pub-goers we just finished playing a game of cricket and planned to play at midnight in a square across the street and that we needed a team to oppose us. During the course of the night we only obtained three opposing players so at last call Robin stood on a balcony and announced to the bar that we planned to play across the street. At closing time a team of drunk business people assembled to face the Spacehijackers. Robin did not tell the drunken cricket players (who at that point included ourselves) the motivation behind the game:

Cricket is a gentlemanly game, completely at odds with the day to day lives of those working in the City Of London. In cricket, money is not everything (we play in whites with no ghastly logos), good manners and honour are respected, selfishness is frowned upon. We have long believed that cricket is a game to sort the men from the gentlemen, the women from the ladies. Therefore we decided to venture into the heart of the Capitalist beast and challenge the inhabitants to show us some moral fiber. Taking them on at a game of cricket and much, much more.<sup>105</sup>

This cricket game posed the Capitalists versus the Anti-Capitalists. During the course of the game, players decided to liven it up with some spirits. As I made rounds collecting donations from players (I might not know much about Cricket but I know a lot about fundraising for booze) I noticed Calf, a Spacehijacker, talking to a man in business attire who walked up to the square

---

<sup>105</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>



minutes before. I approached the two and the man relayed his story to me. Earlier that day he lost his job in the building adjacent to our cricket grounds. In fear of facing his former colleagues he wanted to make a quick midnight run into the building to collect the remainder of his belongings. He then told me with tears in his eyes that it made his day to see us playing and having fun in this place that represented so much loss and sorrow to him. In a gesture sealing the newly unalienated space in his eyes, the man handed me ten pounds to add to the beer fund.

The Spacehijackers commented on the sort of space created for communication during these events. Robin states that during the cricket game they “connected to people we’d never speak to but we kind of create the situation where we can talk.” He argues that in this space he is “not going to try and convert them to anti-capitalism or something like that. But they’re going to be aware of this other thing that can happen.” The possibility of play in ordinary city spaces opens up. Calf admits he “was too drunk to play cricket so (he) sat there on the steps and actually got talking to people and they started asking ‘well, how can you do this?’” He explained to them the project of subverting private, open spaces and got them “really interested.” Ladybird jumps onto Robin’s thought stating that “It’s actually normal, everyday people as much as people who believe in these things [the subversion of space, etc.]” She comments that the opening up of possibility to onlookers is a huge part of the Spacehijackers’ project but that it is often a “difficult process.”

## **Communicating the Political: The Revolutionary Nature of Face to Face Communication**

As illustrated by the stories above, the actions of the Spacehijackers often instigate conversations with onlookers that change the perspective of the onlookers. It is not always that the actions communicate a traditionally political, subversive message. The actions create a space for Marx’s revolutionary self-changing to occur. I discussed this with the Spacehijackers during a focus group interview at Limehouse Town Hall and they informed me that actions like theirs at the Desei Arms Fair, the BoxFresh protest, and the Venture Street action are overtly political.

Robin breaks the political component of the Spacehijackers’ actions down into two parts. He states, “The way I see it we either kind of create ideal situation, you know things we like to

see; or we pretend to be the authorities.”<sup>106</sup> Respectively, the group demonstrates that another world is possible and draws attention to social control by mocking it through performance as those who control space. He believes this is important otherwise people do not realize what the government is doing. According to Robin this is a necessary political action because the government is sneaky and builds up to things slowly. Ladybird argues during this focus group that “it’s one of those important political things that everyone can do and the reason it is political is that they appeal to a certain type of person that believe that the world or their public or general space is being controlled.” She believes the Spacehijackers’ actions attract the type of person who participates and then spreads the word to others. This word-of-mouth, face-to-face form of communication is essential to her argument that the observation of the colonization of space is political. She provides an example regarding the ongoing war in Iraq:

I remember that before the war started in Iraq going into work and saying I think this is a really bad idea for these reasons and speaking to a couple of people being like ‘yea, yea but I read in the papers that on the other end we have to go to war that we have to support our boys we have to do this’ and kind of actually on a one to one level sitting down and explaining why you think the papers are talking crap and why you think this thing is actually wrong and I think there’s so much more to be said when an individual actually communicating with each other and dispelling the myths of the media and all these things in that kind of situation...If you can actually talk sensibly to people and in a non-patronizing way about something you truly believe in then that has more of a chance of rubbing off.<sup>107</sup>

The relaxed nature of the Spacehijackers’ actions aids in the communication of political ideas. Robin notes that their method is much more effective than lecturing people. He believes, “I found it’s much better at getting across to people if you’ve been kind of relaxed and keep a relaxed kind of atmosphere and to not kind of preach politics but to just kind of talk about it.”<sup>108</sup>

## **Limehouse Town Hall Focus Group**

---

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Robin, June 20, 2004.

<sup>107</sup> Ladybird, Focus Group Interview, June 21, 2004.

<sup>108</sup> Robin, Focus Group Interview, June 21, 2004.

How often does the opportunity arise to “just kind of talk about” politics in a relaxed atmosphere if the Spacehijackers tend to hang out with others who share the same beliefs? In much of my own activism I have often felt that my organizing efforts only reached an audience already familiar with the addressed issue. If the Spacehijackers are simply “preaching to the converted,” does a reclamation of alienated space really occur; or are they just putting on a show for like minded individuals? I argue above that onlookers are affected and changed by the actions of the Spacehijackers and desired to see how the Spacehijackers felt about this argument and the notion of preaching to the converted. This question catapulted a discussion turned argument illustrating the revolutionary nature of differences in opinion within activist groups. The fight detailed in the section entitled, “The Revolutionary Nature of Infighting,” shows that it is not only corporations and outside capitalists that strive to co-opt radical actions, but members of the Spacehijackers share similar goals of co-optation. This serves to strengthen the group by offering a perspective not usually seen in radical group. Litost’s capitalist presence in the Spacehijackers allows the group to guess what the “enemy” would do before it is done. The Spacehijackers’ infighting and differences of opinion strengthen the group.

### **Preaching to the Converted?<sup>109</sup>**

This question regarding audience arose during the focus group at Limehouse following a discussion what constitutes “the political.” Ladybird addresses this when she asks:

how much of these things are actually trying to encompass the general public and involve the general public or how much of these things are all about showing the documentation of the project and then being able to travel around the country showing various kinds of groups with a similar opinion? And saying, ‘hey look what we did and look how cleverly we did that.’

She states that this is a question festering inside her. Robin concedes to the notion of preaching to the converted when he brings up Mobile Clubbing.

---

<sup>109</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all input from Spacehijackers in the following two sections comes from the Focus Group Interview held on June 21, 2004.

Arthur invited me to mobile clubbing my first week in London but unfortunately I did not have a headset to club with. I did however hear many accounts of the clubbing and wonder, like Robin, if it is an event that supports my argument in this thesis that the reclamation of space forms networks between those involved and those who observe the event. Mobile clubbing involves many “clubbers” meeting in one place, a street corner or a tube station, all with headphones on. At a certain time all the clubbers begin dancing to the different music playing in their headphones. This situation confuses and wakes up onlookers to the constraints of the space they are in but according to Robin “you have to be really lucky and in on the joke to join in on that whereas...The Circle Line Party...the point of that is that you could have turned up for that as a random and still joined in. With the mobile party you have to have connections.” This statement prompted much discussion amongst the other Spacehijackers with Litost retorting that “if you have the connections then you can join in.” Robin responds that “it doesn’t work as well because people in their heads have a closed space thing and you don’t get as much participation.” Arthur notes that this is simply “a different kind of participation.” Litost agrees with Arthur that “there are still people there. You’re still going up to each other.” Ladybird, with her knack for bringing topics full circle, responds “that’s because you all know each other and you’re quite comfortable with doing things like that.” Litost reminds her that “there are loads of people there,” only to be interrupted by Robin stating that the choice to get involved is a personal choice. He states that approaching strangers “is not a very English” thing to do, but reminds himself that many people do approach the clubbers to ask them what they are doing. Arthur brings the conversation back to the political nature of reclaiming space reminding us that it is about “looking at the kind of city that surrounds you and looking at you personal space and looking at how you can involve yourself with that.” It is about “how you can adapt the space where you live” even though it is “not even engulfed in the big kind of global (sense) like anarchy or something like that, but more kind of doing these things...politics on a smaller scale.” Arthur is bothered “about how the world is run and (thinks) it would be really good if people played more cricket...(Mobile Clubbing is) something like that but it’s like for each individual.” When Arthur relates Mobile Clubbing to a larger subversion of everyday space it stops existing solely as an individualistic event and fits nicely into my argument.

I must admit here that in return for the kindness the Spacehijackers showed me while in London I bought them beer and pizza to consume during our focus group. Perhaps this is an unethical research technique, getting the research subjects drunk; but it seems appropriate for a group of artists who a) carry on a Situationist legacy, and b) drink during most of and almost always after each of their events. Nonetheless, each individual consented, while sober, to the use of this focus group in my thesis. I insert this here to (perhaps) apologize for my own interjections into the conversation, all posed as questions but admittedly influenced by previous observations of differences

of opinions of various Spacehijackers and additionally influenced by the courageous influence of alcohol. At this point in my research with the group I addressed many of these topics previously with individual Spacehijackers and had a good idea where my instigations led. I also



think the cans of beer littering the floor of Limehouse Town Hall served as a truth serum that lead to the honesty and vehemence of the next section.

## **The Revolutionary Power of Infighting**

Ladybird is not only one of the most important emerging artists in London but also one of the most polite as displayed by her statement that:

It's a really nice group to work with cause you're supported by people that have similar opinions and sometimes we'll have an argument about something we disagree with and that makes you question your own political views on something so then you're strengthened to go out and speak with someone else about what you think about.

Litost jumped on this segue into disagreement by switching to a topic he knew the others disagreed with. He stated, “You know I believe if you really want to spread this argument...what you really need to get through to the people is to go out in a business like sort of way and use the systems that already exist but not be afraid of...” I interrupt Litost reminding him that his thesis at art school, which he summarized in his zine *Look Left and Right*, criticized activists’ use of traditional modes of communicating their ideas. I inform him that his last statement is completely opposite of his thesis. He retorts, fumbling, “In the thesis I was saying that they [should]...a lot of people getting together in pubs and businesses and agreeing to different things and all coming together.” Litost, trails off realizing he is contradicting himself, and it gives me the opportunity to ask a question on tape that we discussed many drunken nights. I ask, “Do you consider yourself an anti-capitalist?” This is a question that makes the rest of the group smile because they each have their own opinion about Litost’s ambitions, which according to Robin involve turning the Spacehijackers into a business-like art endeavor.<sup>110</sup> I ask the question not simply to instigate however but also to engage the group as to their shared identity. What issues arise when a group of activist/artists who claim to be “Troublemakers with an anti-capital ‘T’” have capitalists among them?<sup>111</sup> How does this change the observations of alienation in Chapter 2 when a member of the group hopes to reify some of the relationships photographed? Litost responds to my question: “No, I consider myself as a pro-capitalist.”

Litost attempts to explain his point of view while under attack from myself and members of the Spacehijackers. Remembering my role as a researcher I attempt to help him out by asking him if he is saying that he sees capitalism as a way to get his ideas about capitalism across, particularly his ideas about the relationship between creativity, consumption, and co-optation. He then states that “there’s a better system than capitalism and that to me is democracy.” His comparison of an economic system and a system of governance infuriates me as much as it

---

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Robin, June 20, 2004.

<sup>111</sup> <https://spacehijackers.org>

confuses me. Luckily Ladybird interjects with examples of companies like the Body Shop which advertises itself as being “Against Animal Testing.”<sup>112</sup> She notes however that:

It was really great. It was the first time it made people on their high street go recycle plastic and go and get these ethical products.... but on the other side she (the owner) sold that business and now it's doing all these weird things like promoting...what was that ad campaign they had in the windows with the Barbie dolls?

Robin backs up Ladybird’s concerns about the corruptive nature of socially-conscious, capitalist endeavors when he claims that “the Body Shop was advertising that none of its products were tested on animals but they're only allowed to do that because all of the components are.” Arthur addresses Litost and succinctly states his concerns. He states, “I can see what you mean capitalism works very well for certain people but until capitalism works for everybody then I don't see that we have any other choice but to look for something else.”

I ask Arthur how he responds to questions such as “well, what’s the solution?” He responds:

I don't see anything about trying to replace capitalism I don't see anything about creating economic revolution by us taking over. Anti-capitalism is such a negative way of doing it. What you have to look at is that fact that capitalism works for some people and really doesn't work for other people. We have to work out a way that we can all survive. You know anti-capitalism isn't anti-trade. It's not like we're all going to stop selling stuff. Active globalization relies on the fucking internet which is the most global thing in the whole world. It's not about being an anti-capitalist it's about looking at capitalism and saying I see how this works but it's got a lot of faults in it and I'm going to try and find ways.

To my amazement, Litost counterpoints this beautifully articulate statement of Arthur’s by saying, “See I'm not going to automatically agree with that. I think capitalism is a great idea. It’s a great concept.”

---

<sup>112</sup> It pains me a little to write about The Body Shop negatively because my favorite shirt as a junior higher was my Body Shop tee that stated across the back “Against Animal Testing.” As a seventh grader coming to terms with the fact that I might not get straight A’s for the year if I didn’t dissect in science class, this shirt served as a silent protest in a class where my teacher agreed I did not have to dissect but had to watch my lab partner dissect. At the end of the year I wore the shirt to the school board meeting where I received my trophy for getting straight A’s all year. At this point there should be no question as to how I ended up doing graduate work on social movements. I include this mini-narrative to address my familiarity with the concessions involved in standing up for a cause.

Apparently Robin shared my outrage at this comment by a supposed proto-situationist. Robin exclaims, “Its entire concept is the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer! And the poor being poor bastards!” I second that stating, “it’s about creating ways of gaining more profit.” He tells us we are “living in a dream world then ‘cause as human beings we constantly try to put ourselves above other people. We’re always trying this as a race.” I accuse him of separating what he claims to be doing with the Spacehijackers, reclaiming everyday lived life, from his analysis of human nature. I then accuse him of masculinism and Ladybird backs me up. Afraid of seeming like the angry feminist I am, I mumble something to the effect of “not that men have to be. I’m not saying that any of you guys are.” Surprisingly Arthur jumps in to support Litost stating that he believes complete fairness is impossible. The latter half of his statement attacks Litost for having “an extremely immature way of” viewing human nature. Arthur also thinks it is ridiculous that Litost thinks that “just because people want to be above each other that we have to accept that.”

From the right wing, realizing he is losing the argument, Litost retorts “Well at least make people more accountable.” Arthur, still fired up, states, “Exactly, people have to be more accountable. You can’t own a sweatshop and pay people 10 cents a day or whatever they pay them and that’s not progress at all.” Litost then avoids the origin of the discussion when he says, “It’s surely not impossible to have a business or a company where at the same time you’re trying to make money for yourself you’re not hurting anybody at the same time.” He avoids his original argument that capitalism helps people when he hopes that it will only “not (hurt) anybody.” Arthur further pokes holes in Litost’s argument:

But that’s not capitalism. That’s like compassionate capitalism or something like that. Capitalism is like ‘I’m going to make as much money as I can in the simplest, most efficient way that I can.’ And there’s no relevance to human costs or environmental costs or anything. And what we’re saying is that like (in) the World Trade Organization there should be a world environmental organization, a human organization, a health organization. There should be all these things so that free trade efficiency isn’t the epitome of human life. There’s a lot more important things than that.



Reminding the group that he is indeed a Spacehijacker, Litost seemingly ends the discussion by saying “you've got somebody here who's been working with you for quite a long time and still I do not understand or agree with you.”

I then also attempt to sum up the conversation by stating that “That's why I think this is great because we have different understandings of capitalism and what it is and what it isn't and what it's based on.” Unfortunately, I chose to open my mouth and another question popped out, instigating another fight. I say to Litost, “I don't understand what your different idea of what capitalism is. Is it because you don't want to give up what could come (financially)?” He tells me it is possible to make money and Calf chimes in asking “What's so important about making money?” Arthur additionally questions Litost by first stating, “I mean we need to get by; we need to support ourselves somehow,” and then asking, “but why does the roof over your head have to come from money and why does your food have to come from money? Why does money provide the structure for which people organize their social lives?” I point out that is interesting that Arthur and Litost are both craftspeople who cannot (under current social relations) make their products without money. Litost agrees and believes the more money he possess, the more he can produce and spread his message. He states that most people desire to have more money, no matter where it comes from. Ladybird becomes outraged by Litost's statement and yells, “Absolutely not! If a Spacehijacker takes hundreds of thousands of pounds he wouldn't exist as a Spacehijacker. Look at the projects we've been involved in and that we do, the things that we can do cost little or no money at absolute minimum cost and anyone can join in. This is at the core of the Spacehijacker philosophy and Litost's disagreement with what previously seemed to be an underlying tenant of their cause is altered by his presence. Ladybird points out that “the problem with having lots of money is that it goes corrupt and it will corrupt you.” Robin concurred with this statement in a previous interview where he speculated on Litost's ulterior motives and noted the Spacehijackers needed to keep an eye out for him trying to turn the group into a business venture. At this point however, almost two years after this focus group, Litost is still working with the group and the Spacehijackers are still thriving as an anti-capitalist, proto-Situationist endeavor. The group and their actions continue to grow. Perhaps infighting and a constant attention to the co-optation of their actions not only by outside

capitalists but by members of the Spacehijackers keeps the group on their toes and helps them anticipate co-optation.

## **Conclusion: This is What Lived Life Looks Like?**

### **Assessments of the Effectiveness of Performance-Based Subversion and Detournement**

I started out this thesis, a long time ago, seeking to find current examples of alienation as observed by a small group of anti-capitalists keeping the Situationist legacy alive through their subversion of private space and reclamation of public space. Discourse regarding subversion and, most certainly, reclamation is a conversation regarding authority over urban spaces: Who has the ability to reclaim? Who took away the space in the first place? Who let the space be taken away? And, how the hell and why should the reclamation happen? Then, what do we do to make sure the space stays reclaimed? Subverted?

Socio-psychological work on culture jamming and its attempts to reclaim control of production and/or consumption aids in the analysis of the effectiveness of proto-Situationist style activism. I chose the Spacehijackers because I argue that the only way to wake consumers up to the contradictions within the spectacle's appropriation of lived life into image and the subsequent selling back of this image and its resulting alienation to the consumer is through the direct engagement of these consumers in the production of new modes of operating within spaces. In other words, the Spacehijackers awaken consumers to their willful ignorance in perpetuating their own alienation. Performance that encourages the interaction of the occupants of the spaces undergoing subversion transcends traditional modes of two-dimensional advertising. Participants, willing or unwilling, are forced to occupy their everyday spaces in a new way for at least as long as the performance occurs. The subsequent story-telling that occurs through the detailing of events on the Internet, through 'zines, and occasionally through more mainstream media outlets creates a folklore or collective memory that other anti-spectacle artists/activists access to transform the spaces they occupy. A network of uncommodified resistance forms and in this network exists the strength to weather the simultaneous alternation of subjects and predicates within a dialectics of resistance battling under late-capitalism's ever-quickenning time-keeping and co-optation.

This engagement of onlookers<sup>113</sup> displays the transformative power of the combined force of humor, art, and politics. This mode of resistance cannot be discounted as symbolic in that it is the only form of activism that engages alienated subjects in their everyday spaces in a temporally non-co-optable fashion. During the event/action/performance, the activists/artists and the participants/onlookers transform the space, creating the possibility for the reclamation of uncommodified fun.

I argue that the self-changing, everyday, ritualistic and symbolic actions and choices of Spacehijackers to rebel against what they perceive as consumer culture and in turn reclaim and produce alternate spaces are what Marx (1973:29) describes as “the revolutionary activity” of changing oneself. This “revolutionary practice” coincides with the changing of circumstance and therefore the social relations existing between individuals, commodities, and the space within the urban environment used to consolidate the former two in a process of what Lukacs (1968:91) calls reification. In the process of transcending their relationship with commodities and commodified spaces, Spacehijackers create Marx’s (1973:22) change of “circumstances and of human activity” that under Elam’s (2002:11) view engages others living in these space and under these social relations at the same time that it works toward a goal of unitary urbanism. Their performances and actions create a revolution of both everyday life and the way we interact with everyday spaces at the same time that these actions materially transform space.

The lens through which the Spacehijackers perceive London addresses questions regarding who currently holds the right to urban spaces, both private and public. Their vision of the city as a place of possibility where play and performance combine with creativity and non-consumerism to reclaim lived life leads to their attempts at materializing a new way of urban living. Regardless of whether or not the process of achieving this goal is symbolic or material, the maintenance of the Spacehijackers’ actions through the spread of urban mythology, those tales of another London not based on trade or capital but rather endless possibilities for fun and points of discovery, and technological rumor mills does create social change. These individuals experience play and fun and different uses of space. The possibility for a new way of living in

---

<sup>113</sup> Riders on the Tube or bus, occupants of an office building, coffee lovers at a Starbucks, shoppers at a mall, or workers in a department store.

cities therefore grows, just as it did with the Situationists and as it will continue to grow as new artists discover the nuances of everyday detournement.

## Addendum

### Positionality: Researcher, Subject and the Politics of the Personal

I enjoy academic work. I used to think I enjoyed teaching more so than researching and writing, but now it is research and writing I miss the most. I need to pick my subject matter carefully as I choose to pursue projects in the future. I refuse to involve myself in a project I am not passionate about and that is why I research neo-Situationist, culture jammers. This opens up the potential for problems though, a questioning of whether or not I want to be writing about a group like the Spacehijackers or whether I want to participate in a group like the Spacehijackers. Due to my engagement with participatory research methods, I do “participate” in the actions I later write about, but there is a boundary present.

Robin started out the above mentioned focus group that occurred just before I left London admitting that throughout my time with the group everyone tried to “be best mates with Alyson” and forgot at times that my project addressed important concerns regarding social movements. My personality and ability to make friends with people quickly greatly aids a research project like this but also hinders it. The lifestyle of activists and artists is also a lifestyle quite familiar to me and although I spent the year previous to my field research in an academic setting attempting to control my desire for this lifestyle, it is a way of living I easily slid back into. Basically, my ability to party made it easier to befriend the Spacehijackers and due to this ease in warming up to the group I became extremely biased toward what the group is doing. At the end of this project I wonder if it is only because enough time elapsed between when I originally conducted the research and when I sit here writing about it that I can critique the group.

The boundaries of researcher/subject blurred in a way that complicates the findings listed above and confused me as to if I desired to be a researcher or a subject. The question also arises as to whether I could ever manage to do both in my life. My Masters thesis made me realize I want to actively participate in the construction of spaces that change the way people live their everyday lives. I chose the Spacehijackers as subjects because I wanted to be involved in the dissemination of information regarding the reclamation of everyday spaces by anarchist artists and learned in the process that what I really want is to be a person actively working to reclaim

lived life. The Spacehijackers not only taught me how to reclaim my lived life everyday but also stimulated me to undertake Marx's revolutionary act of changing myself. So in an essence I prove my own argument that another world is possible through opening up individuals to their own alienation. At the same time, my relationship to my research and the subject matter changes as I reclaim my life from various alienations.

These alienations resulted not from capitalism's manifestation in the urban environment<sup>114</sup> but from my changing role in my family from that of daughter to that of caretaker and my coming to terms with my sexual/gender identity. The existence of the latter two struggles do not remove me from the everyday alienation of being a city dweller but certainly take center stage in my path toward reclaiming my own lived life. The importance of creating a world where coping<sup>115</sup> occurs is the real revolutionary struggle we all go through. One of my favorite bands<sup>116</sup> sings, "The word cope and the word change are directly opposite, not the same." I liken coping with the everyday in order to get to a personal place where change is possible to formulating a critique of the environments we live in so the subversion and reclamation of these spaces is possible. I know that both ends of this metaphor are possible because somehow I end up finishing this thesis with more personal and political hope than I started out working on it over three years ago.

---

<sup>114</sup> In fact, I love the spaces of capitalism's alienation within the urban environment of my current home, New York City. Each of these spaces is a glimmer of hope of what can be and how detournement waits at every corner.

<sup>115</sup> True reconciliation with the lack of control over certain events, occurrences, and normatives

<sup>116</sup> Arrested Development

## Appendix I

### Email 1: To Spacehijackers

-----Original Message Follows-----

From: "Alyson Newquist" <anewquis@maxwell.syr.edu>

To: <mail@spacehijackers.co.uk>

CC: "Alyson Newquist" <anewquis@maxwell.syr.edu>

Subject: Becoming the Studied

Date: Wed, 4 Feb 2004 22:23:13 -0500

I sent this e-mail via the web-site unaware if I should have sent it to this address. Thought I'd sen it here just in case:

Dearest Spacehijackers,

I'm interested in contributing to your publication list. I'm doing research asking how neo-situationist/culture jammers reclaim commodified urban space in an attempt to subvert dominant capitalist bullshit. I understand you may disagree with the labels just mentioned and I'd like you to give me the opportunity to understand why in addition to other motives and a glimpse into the actions previously undertaken and those to be undertaken in the future.

I study Geography in the United States and am not a cop and have never been a cop. I am also not an undercover cop. I don't even like cops having been pushed around by a few too many in my life. My research will be conducted with the highest levels of confidentiality under the premise of feminist methodologies in order that I can situate myself in a position of betweenness as both a researcher and an activist.



I want to study how you reclaim urban space at the same time insisting it must be fun. I engage in anarcho-activist geography and want to disseminate the word that activism does not have to strangle activists. Please let me know if any of you are willing to talk to me about this. I plan on being in London this summer.

Solidarity and Thanks,  
Alyson Newquist

**Email 2: To Alyson**

From:

Sent: Sat 2/7/2004 5:19 PM

To: mail@spacehijackers.co.uk

Subject: RE: Becoming the Studied

Dear Alison,

Thanks for getting in touch and thanks for the interest in our group. I would be more than willing to have a chat with you about what we do, if you are coming to London this summer then we could meet up and have a chat over a drink, otherwise if it is easier you could email us a series of questions which we could respond to.

Let me know what you fancy doing and I will look forward to hearing from you soon.

Cheers,

Robin & The other bandits at Space Hijackers

### **Email 3: To Spacehijackers**

-----Original Message Follows-----

From: "Alyson Newquist" <anewquis@maxwell.syr.edu>

To: <mail@spacehijackers.co.uk>

Subject: RE: Becoming the Studied

Date: Tue, 20 Apr 2004 21:03:19 -0400

Hello Robin, et al

Sorry it's been so long since I last wrote informing you of my interest in the Spacehijackers, especially considering your prompt reply. I've been busy scrambling together the funds to get to London this summer. Fortunately today I found out I will have enough money to come and (with the help and consent of you all) partake in the project I'd like to.

When I wrote earlier I didn't inform you that the research I am working on is contributing to a Master's Thesis. The point of my thesis is to challenge current theories about social movements/activism that assume the actions taken by groups are either strictly for ritualistic and/or symbolic purposes or that actions are designed to gain some sort of political clout. These theories completely ignore groups like the Spacehijackers and other anarchist-oriented projects who I feel, and hopefully this summer we see if you agree, work to materially rearrange the world through the incorporation of art, life, fun, etc. I realize this is incredibly simplistic explanation

of what you are engaged in and if you agree to partake in the project all of my theoretical background will be available for the taking and the taking apart.

What I would like to do is meet with you and other members of the group to see if/how something like a very flexible inquiry/research project could be used to fuel your purposes. I have ideas of the kinds of methods I'd like to use to see how you all perceive commodification of the urban environment, but anything you disagreed with I wouldn't use. I'd like to disperse disposable cameras to members of the group so that pictures can be taken of what you feel you are fighting against. I have other ideas about what I would like to do but I won't get into it here because everything depends on whether you'd like to engage in it or not. If not hopefully something else will come out of it.

We (the group and myself) could even publish something about the project once it's finished if the group so desires. I don't know what the feelings are of individuals in the group regarding academic-oriented things. I imagine it's a bit distrustful in that I can't imagine engaging in/with anarchy and not having it be distrustful of academia. My motives are purely based on curiosity and a desire to bring anarchist actions back into the discourse within Geography. I recently attended a conference of the American Association of Geographers (though the British were just as present) where there was a plenary on Anarchy and Geography. The all-male panel discussed Reclus, Kropotkin, and the Spanish Civil War for two hours. While it is important to know our anarchist history, I don't think it should come at the ignorance of the present. I hope you still feel comfortable with meeting with me to see what we can make together. I'll be in London beginning sometime between the end of May to the beginning of June. I wish

I was going to be there for May Day. Have fun!

Thanks and sorry this is so God Damn long,

Alyson Newquist

#### **Email 4: To Alyson**

Dear Alyson,

Sorry it has take a while to get back to you, as you guessed we have been up to our necks in mayday planning etc.

I am still definitely up for meeting with you, I am sure that some of the others will be too. I can put a message up on the board when we have more final details so that we can all meet up and share a drink.

The project sounds like it could be really interesting, and I am sure that we can all think of something good to do for it.

Let me know when you are going to be arriving on our fair shores and I will arrange a meeting.

Cheers,

Robin

#### **Email 5: To Spacehijackers**

From: "Alyson Newquist" <anewquis@maxwell.syr.edu>

To: <mail@spacehijackers.co.uk>

Subject: RE: Becoming the Studied

Date: Mon, 17 May 2004 13:34:17 -0400

Hello Robin,

I arrived in London this morning and while I need a few days to stop feeling crazy from 24 hours of flights, I'd love to meet as soon as possible. The number at the house where I am staying is 0208 993 1315 if you'd like to get a hold of me. I can also give you a call if you send me a number to reach you at. Otherwise I should be checking my e-mail frequently. Hope all is well.

Alyson

### **Email 6: To Alyson**

Dear Alyson,

We are having a Space Hijackers social on Friday night, I have cut and pasted details below, it would be great if you could make it, as it would be an excellent opportunity for you to meet people. I have put a bit on the bottom of the email about you possibly coming.

Incase you can't make it, or get lost etc My number is:

0787 606 7703

Cheers,

Robin

## SPACE HIJACKERS SOCIAL & PLANNING MEETING!

Meet Friday 21st May

6pm onwards

The Angel

St Giles High Street

London

(Nearest Tube Tottenham Ct Rd)

Click below for a map

[http://www.streetmap.co.uk/newmap.srf?  
x=529973&y=181270&z=1&sv=529750,181250&st=4&ar=Y&mapp=newmap.srf&searchp=new  
search.srf](http://www.streetmap.co.uk/newmap.srf?x=529973&y=181270&z=1&sv=529750,181250&st=4&ar=Y&mapp=newmap.srf&searchp=newsearch.srf)

-----

There have been several projects bouncing around on the message boards for the past couple of months, plus a few agents have some ideas up their sleeves. So we decided it would be good to meet up for a drink, a chat and then probably more drinks, then perhaps bash out some ideas and set dates for some of the projects in mind.

Ideas to be worked on:

INTERNATIONAL TOILET GALLERY 2

CITY CRICKET MATCH

RAAAAAAAAAA

ROOFTOP PICNICS

BUS PARTIES

CLP3?

BIRMINGHAM A-Z TOUR

SWEDEN OUTSIDE-IN CONFERENCE

If you have any ideas, suggestions, comments, useful skills etc bring them along.

Bring a diary and hopefully we can pencil in some dates for a Summer of Space Hijacking.

Cheers & Keep in trouble!

SH HQ

p.s. We may also be joined by a lovely lady who is studying a geography masters and would like to give us all disposable cameras to take photos of what we believe it is we are fighting against!

## Appendix II

### Definitions

Alienation-the state of feeling estranged or separated from one's milieu, work, products of work, or self.<sup>117</sup>

Commodification-the completion of the transformation of labor, the products of labor, the producers of labor, and the consumers of dead labor into images and products to be bought

Constructed Situation-a moment of life concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary ambiance and a game of events\*

Culture Jammer-Person who engages in deliberate subversion of commodified space through the use

of billboard modification, the wheat pasting of posters, the use of graffiti, etc. in order to reclaim the space for anti-capitalist purposes

Derive-a mode of experimental behaviors linked to the conditions of urban society: a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances\*

Detournment-short for detournment of preexisting aesthetic elements... detournment within the old cultural spheres is a method of propaganda, a method which testifies to the wearing out and loss of importance of those spheres\*

Psychogeography-the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals\*

---

<sup>117</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9005729/alienation>



Unitary Urbanism-the theory of the combined use of arts and techniques as means contributing to the construction of a unified milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior.\*

---

\* All asterisked definitions either directly or in slightly modified form from <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/1.definitions.htm>. Definitions originally from the first Situationniste Internationale, 1958.

## Bibliography

Amin A and Nigel Thrift (2002) *Cities: Reimagining the Urban*. Malden, MA: Polity Press

Best S and Douglas Kellner “Debord and the Postmodern Turn: New Stages of the Spectacle,” *Illuminations*.

Billboard Liberation Front (2003) “Manifesto,” <http://www.billboardliberation.com/rant/manifesto.html>

Blisset L (1995) “Guy Debord is Really Dead.” London: Sabotage Editions

Carr C (1999) “Wheat Pasting Against the Machine: Guerrilla Artists Celebrate 20 Years of Culture Jamming,” *The Village Voice*, 28 April-4 May, <http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/9917/carr.php>

Clark T (1999) *Forward to Guy Debord*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Debord G (1954) *La Carte d’apres nature*.

Debord G (1955) “Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography,” *Le Letres Nues* #6

Debord G (1955) “Why Lettrism?,” *Potlatch* #22

Debord G (1956) “Methods of Detournement,” *Les Letres Nues* #8

Debord G (1958) “Theory of the Derive,” *Internationale Situationniste* #2

Debord G (1959) “Situationist Theses on Traffic,” *Internationale Situationniste* #3

Debord G (1961) “Perspectives for Conscious Alterations In Everyday Life,” *Internationale Situationniste* #6

Debord G (1991) *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*. Sheffield: Pirate Press

Debord G (1991) *Panegyric*. London: Verso

Debord G (1994) *The Society of the Spectacle*. New York: Zone Books

Elam, H. (1997). *Taking it to the streets : the social protest theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Infoshop (2003) <http://www.infoshop.org>

Jappe A (1999) *Guy Debord*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Jorn A (1964) “Guy Debord and the Problem of the Accursed,” *Contre Le Cinema*

Knabb K (2003) *Guy Debord: Complete Cinematic Works*. Oakland: AK Press

Marx K (1973) *The German Ideology*. C.J. Arthur (ed.) International Publishers, London. p 29

Pinder D (2000) ““Old Paris is No More”: Geographies of Spectacle and Anti-Spectacle,” *Antipode*, 32 (4)

Segal P (2003) “Billboard Liberation Front,” Billboard Liberation Front. <http://www.billboardliberation.com/media/p.segal.html>

Spacehijackers (2003) <https://spacehijackers.org>.

Swyngedouw E (2003) “The Strange Respectability of the Situationist City in the Society of the Spectacle,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 26.1

Szerszynski, B. (2002) “Ecological Rites: Ritual Action in Environmental Protest Events” *Theory, Culture and Society* 19, no. 3 (2002): 51-69

Focus Group Interview, June 21, 2004

Interview with Arthur, June 4, 2004

Interview with Ben Invasion and Mike Cupcake, June 15, 2004

Interview with Robin, June 20, 2004

Arthur’s Notes on Photographs

Ben Invasion’s Notes on Photographs

Ladybird’s Notes on Photographs

Robin’s Notes on Photographs